# Weird Tales

## The Unique Magazine

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"Asam's terrific gaze was withdrawn for an instant, Lanae's hand darted toward the silver tripod and tube."

# City from the Sea

BY EDMOND HAMILTON

*The tale of a lost continent cast up by the sea, and the dread menace it held for the people of our world—a thrill-tale of startling perils and eery events*

KIRK WILSON came back to consciousness slowly. He was lying on the fore companionway of the yacht, drenched to the skin with sea-water, and a litter of miscellaneous debris had washed down the steps onto him. He lay for a moment dazed, his head throbbing with pain, trying to remember what had

happened. The catastrophe had come so suddenly that everything was still mixed up in his mind.

The motor yacht *Estrella,* of which he was first mate, had been sailing smoothly over the glassy South Pacific when it had happened. There had been no warning at all.

A towering blue wall of water had appeared in the southeast, a mountainous mass of sea that rolled with incredible swiftness toward the yacht. Kirk Wilson had been racing up from the companionway to the deck, when that advancing wall of water hit the *Estrella* and flung it like a toy. Then he had known nothing more.

"Head must have hit the steps," Kirk muttered thickly, wincing from pain.

Then as he clambered painfully to his feet, he became aware that the yacht was tossing on big waves.

"Didn't sink yet, anyway," he told himself grimly, as he struggled up the swaying companionway.

When Kirk emerged onto the deck, he stopped for a moment, appalled by the sight that met his eyes. The ordinarily trim white decks of the *Estrella* were now a litter of wreckage. Canopies and deckchairs had been washed away, boats had been smashed to flinders, and the wireless masts and the whole deckhouse containing the radio apparatus had been swept away.

The sea was running in high, leaden waves under a heavily overcast sky. The *Estrella's* Diesels were still throbbing, however, and the yacht was limping southeastward at reduced speed, bucking the heavy sea.

Kirk staggered toward the bridge. Its windows had been smashed out, but otherwise it remained intact. He met Sven Halsen, the big Norwegian engineer, stumbling toward him along the deck.

"Half the crew were swept away, sir!" cried the big man, his massive face aghast. "I don't know what——"

"How about Mr. Wade and his guests?" Kirk snapped.

Halsen jerked a thumb toward the stern of the yacht, where lay the owner's quarters.

"They're all safe, I think," the Norwegian said huskily. "They were all down in the saloon when it hit us."

Kirk hurried on toward the bridge where he found Captain Ross Whieldon and a scared-looking helmsman.

"Good God, sir, what hit us?" Kirk cried as he burst in. "A tidal wave?"

Captain Whieldon slowly turned toward him. The round, ordinarily genial red face of the captain was pale and stiff and strange, now. And his blue eyes had a queer, opaque quality.

"Yes, Mr. Wilson," he said in a thick, slow voice. "It was a tidal wave, caused, I believe, by some great subterranean disturbance."

Kirk stared at the captain. There was something queer about Whieldon—about the strange, stiff manner of his speaking, the set and staring expression on his face. Those cold, opaque blue eyes—they didn't seem to Kirk like Whieldon's eyes at all. They had something odd peeping out of them, something alien and chilling.

"Stunned yet, by the shock," Kirk told himself. Aloud he said, "Shall I take over for the time being, sir? You look rather done up."

"No, Mr. Wilson, I shall retain command," Whieldon answered in the same stiff, slow accents.

KIRK frowned uncertainly. Then as he glanced at the compass, the frown on his virile blond face deepened.

"Why, we're heading southeastward, sir!" he exclaimed, astonished.

"Yes, I just gave Trask the order," Whieldon said heavily.

"But we should be heading north, toward Hawaii!" Kirk cried. "There's noth-

ing southeastward but two thousand miles of empty ocean."

"That's what I told him, sir!" squeaked Trask, the scared-looking little helmsman at the wheel.

"I am commanding here, Mr. Wilson," answered Captain Whieldon stonily, his colorless face mask-like.

"But it's suicide to head that way!" Kirk protested. "We've no radio now to call for help, our plates may be strained, and we've lost half our crew! We should make straight for Hawaii."

"I say we head southeast," Whieldon repeated tonelessly. "If you continue to act in this insubordinate manner, I shall have you put in irons."

Kirk bit his lip to repress the boiling retort that sprang up inside him. The little helmsman, Trask, was looking at him in scared appeal. He felt like ordering Trask to steer north, and taking the consequences. But ingrained habits of discipline and obedience made Kirk control his impulse.

"Go aft and see to Mr. Wade and his guests," Whieldon was ordering in the same slow, stiff voice.

"Very well, sir," Kirk rasped, and then turned to leave the bridge.

At that moment, a queer and unnerving thing happened. Captain Whieldon's stiff, mask-like face suddenly quivered, worked, came alive! For just an instant, the unhuman, alien mask dropped from his countenance, and the tortured face and eyes were those of Whieldon himself.

"Wilson, for God's sake don't——" he gasped hoarsely, then stopped.

"What is it, sir?" Kirk cried quickly.

But, swiftly as it had come, that change vanished. Whieldon's face became again the stiff, colorless mask. And his voice, when he continued, was again slow, heavy and dead.

"Nothing," he said tonelessly. "Go aft and see to the owner's party."

Kirk hesitated, his nerves quivering like harp-strings. There had been something vaguely horrible about that brief resurgence of Whieldon's normal personality. But the captain's opaque blue eyes were now regarding him with that stony, alien expression. Baffled, Kirk turned and went down from the bridge onto the deck.

Halsen, the big engineer, had been peering into the bridge and had seen and heard. The Norwegian's massive face was knotted in a puzzled, fearful expression.

"Mr. Wilson, something's happened to the captain!" he burst out. "Why does he want to steer southeast? We ought to make a port as fast as we can."

Inwardly, Kirk agreed. But the age-old discipline of the sea kept him from voicing what he felt.

"Get back down to your Diesels, Halsen," he snapped. "I'll be down for inspection as soon as I see to the passengers."

But as Kirk hurried aft along the wreckage-littered deck, barking sharp orders to the stunned-looking half-dozen seamen who had emerged from below, he was still feeling the queer horror that had oppressed him during that moment when Whieldon had changed.

The wild, desperate appeal in the captain's voice for that one instant had been deeply disturbing. And there had been something dimly terrifying about the swiftness with which that appeal had been smothered by the return of Whieldon's new, strange personality.

Something had happened to Whieldon's mind—some deep and dreadful change brought about, in some fashion, by the sudden catastrophe. For just a moment, the normal man had triumphed in the captain's brain, and then had been smothered again.

KIRK reached the aft companionway and hurried down into the luxurious saloon, the living and dining quarters of the yacht's owner and his guests. Here

wicker chairs and tables had been flung crazily about, and soda siphons and highball glasses lay smashed on the floor.

Tony Wade, the young millionaire owner of the *Estrella,* came stumbling toward him. He had a nasty cut on his forehead, and his dark, handsome face was dazed.

"What was it?" he stammered to Kirk. "A hurricane?"

"Tidal wave of some kind," Kirk rapped. "Are your guests all right?"

"I—guess so," Wade mumbled.

Kay Marlin came running toward them. The girl's dark hair was in disarray, and her small, lovely face was pale, her brown eyes wide with anxiety.

"My aunt and uncle!" she cried. "Tony, they were going back to their cabin when it happened——"

Kirk started back with her toward the cabin corridor. But Wallace Marlin's aggressive, middle-aged face appeared ahead, coming to meet them.

The financier was half dragging and half carrying the unconscious figure of his wife.

"Aunt Edith?" cried Kay, alarmed.

"She's all right—just fainted," her uncle told her gruffly. "Get me some water."

Kirk Wilson turned. Now he located the other two of Wade's five guests.

Berty Merton, pudgy young heir of a great industrialist, was clambering to his feet from a pile of overturned chairs. His round, kewpie face was pasty with fear.

"Is it the end of the world?" he cried.

"Hell, no," snapped Kirk disgustedly.

He went to the corner where the fifth of Tony Wade's guests was sitting.

This was Linda Lee, whose golden beauty flashed from a thousand motion picture screens every night. She didn't look beautiful at the moment. She sat stiffly in the corner like a doll that had been flung there, and kept screaming monotonously in a thin, mechanical voice.

"Stop that!" Kirk ordered harshly.

She kept screaming, her dilated blue eyes not even seeming to see him.

He stooped and slapped her face hard. The action was effective in halting her hysteria. She stared unbelievingly up at him, and then burst into a shower of tears.

"Are we going to sink?" Berty Merton was crying in panic. "Shall we take to the boats?"

Kirk ignored the pudgy, terrified youth. He turned to Tony Wade.

Wade seemed to be getting a grip on himself, and had bound his cut forehead with a handkerchief.

"Is the yacht hurt bad, Wilson?" he asked Kirk anxiously. "Can we make Hawaii?"

Kirk shrugged. "We could make Hawaii all right, I think. But Captain Whieldon is steering southeast."

"Southeast?" Wade stared uncomprehendingly. "But there's no land in that direction. Why should he steer there?"

"You'll have to ask him," Kirk said. tightly.

"I'll ask him," Wade declared. "Why, he must have gone crazy!"

Kirk followed the young millionaire back up on deck, Kay Marlin coming with them. Wade headed straight for the bridge.

WHIELDON was still there, staring stonily ahead across the leaden, heaving sea. And Trask, the little helmsman, was still holding the craft southeastward.

"Captain Whieldon, why the devil are we going southeast?" Wade demanded. "Turn around and head for Hawaii, at once."

Whieldon's stiff, strange mask of a face did not change. There was not even a flicker in his cold, opaque blue eyes as he faced the young millionaire.

"I am commanding this craft, Mr. Wade," he said heavily. "It is up to me to lay our course."

"Then I dismiss you as captain!" Tony Wade declared angrily. "Wilson, I am putting you in command. Lay a course for Honolulu at once."

Kirk Wilson, frowning, stepped forward. But he stopped, almost at once, for Whieldon had drawn a revolver from his pocket and was covering them all with it.

"Get off this bridge," the stiff-faced captain ordered tonelessly, "or I'll shoot."

Looking into the alien, opaque eyes of the man, Kirk knew that he meant it. Whieldon, the ordinarily genial, good-humored captain, had somehow become a cold, strange being who held their lives at no worth whatever.

"You're stark mad!" Tony Wade declared heatedly. "I'll——"

Whieldon's cold eyes were deadly in their complete lack of emotion. His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Out of here," he repeated stonily, "unless you want a bullet."

Appalled, Tony Wade backed out of the bridge and down the steps. Whieldon's gun swung on Kirk, and the young first mate slowly followed the owner. Trask, the frightened little helmsman, looked after Kirk with desperate appeal in his eyes.

Halsen and the half-dozen seamen had gathered together on deck and were staring worriedly up at the bridge. And Wallace Marlin and his fluttery, terrified wife, with Berty Merton and Linda Lee, were joining the group.

"Whieldon's gone stark, staring mad," Wade gritted furiously. "Only a madman would steer into the southeast, where there is not even a speck of land for two thousand miles."

"It's something worse than just madness," Kirk declared, frowning. "Something weird has happened to him. It's as though another personality had taken possession of him."

Halsen, the big engineer, nodded agreement, his massive face blanched by superstitious fear.

"Aye, he is a man possessed by a devil!" whispered the Norwegian. "A warlock has gripped his body——"

"Stuff and nonsense!" barked Wallace Marlin. The financier's gruff face showed disgust. "This talk of devils and warlocks is wasting time—I want to know what we're going to do."

"Wilson, it's up to you," Tony Wade declared. "I've put you in command."

Kirk spoke swiftly. "Halsen, go down and stop the Diesels. That'll keep us from being carried further on this crazy course, at least. Mr. Wade, will you get two pistols from the gun-locker in Whieldon's cabin?"

Tony Wade hurried off. Halsen was making toward the engine-room hatchway, when he was halted by a hail from the bridge.

Captain Whieldon, gun in hand, was looking down from the bridge door at them. His stiff, dead voice reached them.

"If you are thinking of stopping the motors—don't," he warned tonelessly. "If you do, I'll kill Trask."

"What shall I do, sir?" asked Halsen horrified, looking toward Kirk.

"Please, Mr. Wilson, don't stop the motors!" came Trask's pleading, frightened voice. "He'll do it!"

Kirk's blond face tightened. "We'll have to let the Diesels run. We can't sacrifice Trask's life."

Tony Wade came hurrying back from his mission.

"The gun-locker in Whieldon's cabin—it's empty!" he exclaimed. "And there isn't another weapon on the yacht."

"Whieldon must have thrown all the other firearms overboard, before the rest of us regained consciousness," Kirk muttered. "It's going to be a tough business overpowering him, without a gun."

"Count me out of it," quavered Berty Merton, his pudgy face pale. "I don't want to commit suicide."

"Why, Berty, wouldn't you fight to save my life?" Linda Lee asked the tubby young heir, astonished.

"Sure, let's rush the bridge now!" Wade suggested excitedly. "There's nine or ten of us to his one."

"This isn't a movie, Mr. Wade," Kirk snapped. "We'd half of us lose our lives if we tried such a stunt. We'll have to wait until night, then try it. Under cover of darkness, we'll have a chance."

"I'm afraid," said Kay Marlin unexpectedly, her small face pale. "There's something horrible and strange about the captain. He doesn't even seem human, any more."

HOUR followed hour, and the *Estrella* forged on southeastward into the vast Pacific. The high seas had steadily quieted, but it was still a leaden, desolate ocean over which they sailed. As the afternoon drew to an end, the overcast sky began slowly to clear.

Kirk watched the murky, blood-dabbed sunset that smoldered in the western heavens. Up in the bridge, he could discern the small form of Trask at the wheel, and the stiff, alertly watchful figure of Captain Whieldon.

What horrible thing *had* happened to the captain? he wondered again. There had been something in his eyes and voice that had chilled Kirk to the core of his spine—something alien and loathsome, the very proximity of which had sent cold ripples down the young mate's back.

He tried to shake off his dark oppression, and went down into the saloon where Tony Wade and his guests had gathered. The chairs and tables had been righted. Wallace Marlin was soothing his sobbing, fluttery wife, Berty Merton was drinking Scotch and soda with the moving-picture star, while Wade talked in a low voice to Kay Marlin.

"It'll be dark in another hour," Kirk told the young millionaire. "We'll try rushing the bridge then."

Wade nodded nervously. "I wish to God I'd never thought of this cruise," he exclaimed. "If we get out of this safely, I'll confine my yachting to Newport and Palm Beach."

Linda Lee came up to them and asked Kirk anxiously, "We'll reach Hawaii before next week, won't we? I have to be back in Hollywood in two weeks, to start my new picture."

"Don't talk like a fool, Linda," Kay told her indignantly. "We may be lucky to be living two weeks from now, let alone——"

She was stricken to silence by the hoarse, excited yell that came from above-decks.

"Land ho!" Halsen was shouting.

*"Land?"* cried Kirk. "Why, there's no land within a thousand miles of here!"

He leaped to the companionway and ran up on deck, the others following excitedly.

Halsen and the excited seamen came running along the deck toward him. The big Norwegian pointed a shaking finger ahead across the sunset-lit ocean.

"Look, Mr. Wilson!" he cried.

Kirk stared. And he felt his brain stagger at what he saw. It was land, a long, low coast stretching squarely across their path, extending roughly north and south for many miles, as far as the eye could reach; a low, gray-green, steaming land from which heavy vapors were rising into the lurid sunset, and which was guarded by rocks and shoals on which breakers dashed ghost-white.

"Good Lord, we can't be seeing this!" Kirk cried wildly. "It's a continent—a whole continent here where there ought to be nothing but empty sea!"

"Maybe a mistake in navigation——"

Tony Wade started to say, but Kirk shook his head fiercely.

"No! I knew our position exactly, and the nearest land of that size is a thousand miles or more away!"

In the blood-red, murky sunset, the *Estrella* was moving straight on with Diesels throbbing toward the mysterious shore. Then the incredible explanation came suddenly to Kirk.

"This is a *new* land—a land that has just risen from the sea!" he exclaimed. "Some vast subterranean convulsion forced it up, and its emergence caused the tidal wave that nearly wrecked us!"

They stared incredulously at the low coast steaming in the sunset.

"That's impossible," Tony Wade said. Then his eyes widened. "But haven't I read somewhere that there was once a continent in the South Pacific, that sank into the sea thousands of years ago?"

Kirk nodded. "Geologists say there was such a land—the continent Mu, legendary seat of a great civilization."

"Then Mu has risen again, after thousands of years?" Kay Marlin whispered, her face white.

"I don't believe it!" snapped her uncle. "This is some land or island marked on maps. If it isn't, how would Captain Whieldon have known to steer straight toward it?"

The question struck like a cold whip across Kirk's excited thoughts. Its implications brought him a strange feeling of dread. Why *had* Whieldon chanced to steer straight toward this newly-risen land? Had it just been chance, or had Whieldon somehow known. . . .

THEY were sweeping closer toward the gray-green, steaming coast. Kirk saw that the yacht was heading toward a small cove that indented the shore, outside which lay a veritable maze of rocks and shoals, white with foaming breakers.

"Whieldon's going to take us into that cove," Tony Wade muttered, amazed.

"He'll never make it!" Kirk declared, his blond face grim. "No pilot could steer through those uncharted banks and rocks. Unless we stop him, he'll pile the yacht up!"

And Kirk started determinedly toward the bridge. He could see Whieldon up there, holding the wheel himself now and steering the *Estrella* straight toward the cove. Trask was crouching in a corner, terrified.

Kirk had gone but two steps upward before Whieldon glimpsed him coming. The captain turned and shot in a single movement.

The cracking report of the revolver was simultaneous with a white-hot pain that burned along Kirk's right shoulder.

"Stay back, or I'll shoot to kill," warned Whieldon's toneless voice. "And I'll kill Trask first!"

Kirk reeled back down the steps, holding his grazed, bleeding shoulder.

"We can't stop him," he rasped. "God help us when we hit those shoals!"

The roar of breakers was growing ominously louder as the *Estrella* plunged on toward the maze of rocks and banks outside the cove. The yacht, caught by swift currents, seemed to quicken its forward pace as though eager to rush to its own destruction.

In the crimson, smoldering sunset, the scene was appalling. The roaring white hell of foam ahead; the low, steaming, oozy land beyond, whose veils of vapor went solemnly upward like sacrificial smokes; and up in the bridge, the devil possessed, mask-faced madman who was piloting them toward destruction.

Kirk gripped the rail and waited grimly for the catastrophe. Over the thunderous roar of breakers he could hear Linda Lee's screams. He was aware that Kay Marlin was holding tightly to his arm, and he

glimpsed young Merton's pudgy face, drained of all color, his eyes popping.

The *Estrella* pitched and plunged sickeningly as it was swept into the white hell of tumbling waters. Rushing waves screamed over rocks and exploded into white foam that hung in the air like smoke. Spray dashed and stung their faces.

But the shock of collision did not come. Somehow, by sheer miracle it seemed, the yacht drove on between the fanged rocks and shoals, almost scraping between them.

And suddenly it was through the breakers, gliding smoothly and serenely into the calm waters of the sheltered cove.

"My God!" cried Halsen hoarsely. "Only a devil from hell could have piloted us through that!"

"Shut off the Diesels!" Kirk ordered him. "The yacht's safe in here, for the time being."

Tony Wade was gazing westward, across the oozy, vaporing land that now lay on three sides of them.

"Look there!" the young millionaire cried wildly, pointing west. "A *city!*"

"You're seeing things!" Kirk exclaimed. "You're——"

His jaw sagged, his voice trailed to silence, as he stared westward where Wade was pointing.

Miles away, black against the smoldering sunset, stood out a cluster of strange towers; cyclopean pylons like slender, upright cylinders, crowned by flat cupolas. Distant and vague and unreal they looked, through the shifting vapors.

THERE was something so grotesque, so other-worldly about the appearance of those far, monstrous towers, that it struck them all to silence. Their faces wild in the red rays of the murky sunset, they stared and stared.

"A city!" whispered Halsen thickly. The Norwegian's eyes were dilated. "A city that has come up from the sea with this ancient land!"

"Yes, a city of lost Mu!" cried Tony Wade excitedly. "Buried beneath the sea for thousands on thousands of years! Good Lord, we're seeing a place no human eye has looked on for millenniums!"

"I don't like it," faltered Kay Marlin, her brown eyes very wide, her small hand gripping Kirk's sleeve. "It looks unhuman, alien——"

"It can't be anything more than a heap of slimy ruins," Kirk assured her. He fought down the vague repulsion that he felt at sight of those distant towers, and added, "This will drive the archeologists crazy when they hear about it. And if——"

*Bump!* The shock was not a heavy one, but it almost threw them from their feet.

The *Estrella,* its motors dead, had drifted to the shore of the cove and buried its bow in the soft, oozy green mud there. The yacht now lay motionless.

They could look down over the rail onto the oozy muck surface of this new-risen land. Green, drying slime covered everything, and from it heavy vapors still rose silently into the deepening twilight.

Bodies of fishes and small sea-creatures lay in hollows where they had been trapped by the rising of the land. The heavy stink of slime from the oozy shore was rank and overpowering.

"Aground!" muttered Halsen. "Aground here on a new devil's-land from the sea, with no radio, no boats——"

"Here comes the captain," cried Berty Merton suddenly, his pudgy face fearful as he shrank back.

Kirk stiffened. Captain Whieldon was coming down from the bridge onto the deck.

The captain advanced with stiff, heavy tread toward them. As he neared them, through the dusk Kirk saw that his face was still the weirdly stiff, colorless mask, that his eyes were still opaque and expres-

sionless. Yet Captain Whieldon's words, when he spoke to Wade, were placating.

"I'm sorry I acted as I did, Mr. Wade," he said tonelessly. "I guess I must have been out of my head from the shock."

Tony Wade seemed to breathe more easily, but his voice was angry.

"You certainly picked a fine time to go off your head, Whieldon!" he declared. "You've run us ashore on the coast of this God-forsaken land—have got us into a hell of a fix."

"I'm sorry," Whieldon repeated stonily.

"Well, Wilson is in command now," Tony Wade snapped. "And suppose you hand over that pistol."

Silently, without protest, Whieldon extended the pistol. Wade took it. Then the captain turned and without a word stalked heavily off to his cabin. They were all dumb, peering after him through the dusk until he vanished.

"Thank God he's come to his wits, anyway!" said Wade relieved.

"He's still — queer," Kirk declared tightly. "Something's still the matter with him. I wish I knew what."

"The warlock who gripped his body still masters him!" muttered Halsen in a fearful whisper.

Trask, the little helmsman who had been prisoned in the bridge with Whieldon, came stumbling toward them. His wizened face was deathly with terror.

"He—he ain't a man any longer!" Trask babbled incoherently. "I saw it in his face up there! We ought to kill him, to kill the devil in him!"

"You can count on me. I'd be for it," muttered Halsen.

"Are you two crazy—proposing murder?" rasped Kirk. "You're letting your superstitions run away with you."

"How are we going to get out of this cursed hole, Wilson?" Tony Wade wanted to know.

"Can't we get out of here tonight?" Kay Marlin asked breathlessly. "I—I don't like this place."

"No chance of leaving here tonight," Kirk answered crisply. "In the morning, we'll get the Diesels going, reverse out of this mud, and if we're lucky, we'll be able to scrape back out through those shoals and steer for Hawaii. Meanwhile," he added, "I suggest you people get some sleep. We'll stand regular watches. I'll take the first, till midnight, and you, Halsen, the second."

Complete darkness had fallen. Passengers and seamen began to move silently toward their quarters.

"I don't feel like sleeping," Kay told Kirk, her face a pale, strained blur in the darkness. She gazed westward into the night. "Those monstrous towers——"

"Forget about them," Kirk advised. "There's nothing in a lot of old stones to harm you."

But when the others had gone, leaving him alone on deck, Kirk peered westward himself through the steamy darkness, his heart beating with increased rapidity. He felt engulfed by strange, swirling mysteries.

What could explain Whieldon's strange appearance and conduct? How came it that, as soon as the new land had risen from the ocean, Whieldon had suddenly become a stony-faced automaton who had guided the *Estrella* straight toward the newly-risen land, straight toward this cove, toward the dead city?

Kirk tried to force these things from his mind, to concentrate his thoughts upon the problem of getting away from here in the morning. But an hour later, when the moon rose and cast a pale white light upon the oozy plain, he was still staring westward toward the dim, distant towers, wondering and wondering. . . .

HALSEN appeared so promptly at midnight that Kirk guessed the big Norwegian had not slept at all.

"Is everything all right?" the engineer asked in an apprehensive whisper, glancing west through the unreal moonlight.

"Of course," Kirk answered. "Keep your eyes open, Halsen—but I don't think we've anything to fear."

He left Halsen peering fixedly west, where vague and distant cupola-crowned towers rose misty in the moonlight.

Kirk found it hard to get to sleep. He tossed in his bunk, listening to the slow, restless tread of Halsen, up on deck. The rank stink of slime from the oozy shore filled his cabin, was heavy in his nostrils.

He gradually drifted into a troubled sleep. And in his slumber, the feeling of oppression that had gripped him ever since the catastrophe deepened until it was like a dark, dank fog enclosing him. Out of that veiling darkness, there emerged to Kirk's slumbering brain a shape that swept toward him as though from remote spaces of dream. A human shape—or was it human?

It was a girl he saw in his dream—but not any girl such as he had ever seen before. She was subtly unhuman—yet beautiful. Silky, sea-green hair poured back from a face of elfin beauty. Not white, but pale green, was her skin. And out of that hauntingly lovely, hauntingly alien green face, two great, dark, purple eyes looked into Kirk's soul with vibrant appeal.

"Let me possess your body," she seemed whispering to Kirk. "I am Lanae—Lanae of the Firstborn. And unless I can possess a human body quickly, Arn will win!"

Softly, her mind seemed taking possession of his slumbering body. And frantically, in his dream, he fought that silent, subtle invasion.

"You must not resist!" Lanae's anguished, urgent thought beat upon him. "You *must* let me have your body——"

He felt his mental defenses going down before her. He felt his own mind, his own personality, being crowded aside in his body by the throbbing, eager mind of Lanae. Then, on the verge of complete surrender, Kirk heard a shrill, distant cry. He sensed a frantic intensifying of Lanae's mental attack—but too late for her! For as that shrill cry was repeated, Kirk woke from his nightmare dream.

He sat up in his bunk, trembling violently, bathed in cold sweat.

"God above!" he whispered hoarsely. "*Was* it a dream?"

Then he remembered the cries that had awakened him. They had come from up on deck.

Still trembling from his weird experience, Kirk sprang out of his bunk. Unsteadily, he ran up the companionway onto the deck.

The moon was ascending toward the zenith. In its vague white light, the oozy plain of the newly-risen land stretched away in dim unreality from the cove where the *Estrella* was grounded.

Tony Wade was bending in the moonlight over a man who lay prostrate on the deck. Kirk ran to them. The prone figure was Halsen, and he was unconscious. There was a bruise on the Norwegian's temple.

Kirk's rough restorative measures soon caused Halsen to open his eyes. There was dread in them as he looked wildly up into their faces.

"What happened?" Kirk cried.

"Whieldon — Captain Whieldon," answered the Norwegian hoarsely. "He's gone— toward that city."

"To that city?" Kirk repeated. "Why did you let him go?"

"I couldn't stop him!" Halsen cried. "He came up on deck, his face still stiff and queer, his eyes still cold and strange. He started toward the rail. I ran to stop him, and he hit me with a crowbar he carried."

"I found Halsen unconscious, and yelled for help," Tony Wade added. "I couldn't sleep—came up for air."

THE others on the yacht had gathered hastily on deck while Halsen had told his brief story. And a gasp of horror went up from them.

"The devil that's got hold of the captain—it *made* him go out there, to that hell-city!" Trask cried fearfully.

"Nonsense," muttered Wallace Marlin, but the word seemed to stick in his throat.

Kirk's mouth was dry with sudden dread. He was remembering his own experience in sleep—the strange apparition of the girl who had called herself Lanae of the Firstborn, who he had dreamed, had tried to seize his body.

What if that dream had been reality? And what if that alienly lovely girl had seized control of Whieldon's body as she had tried to possess his? Was it she who had for some dark purpose forced Whieldon to steer toward this newly-risen land, and had caused him to go toward the distant city of towers?

Remembering the pure, subtly unhuman beauty of Lanae's elfin face, the eager, urgent agony of anxiety in her great purple eyes, Kirk could not believe that any dark purpose was hers. And what had she cried in his dream—that unless she possessed a human body soon, Arn would win? Who—what—was Arn?

"There's something horrible in that city," Kay Marlin was saying fearfully, gazing westward with terror-fascinated eyes into the pale moonlight. "Something that called the captain——"

"Can't we start the Diesels and try to get away from this devil's land now?" Halsen appealed hoarsely to Kirk. "Before we're all seized by warlocks like the captain?"

Kirk felt an almost irresistible desire to accede, to flee this haunted, mysterious land from the deep as a place accursed. But he forced himself to withstand the impulse.

"We can't do that," he rasped. "We can't desert one of our party—can't leave Whieldon here to die."

"I tell you, he's not a man like us any more!" Halsen cried. "He's a devil!"

"Stow that talk!" Kirk snapped. "Whieldon was still out of his head from the shock today. He wandered off without knowing what he was doing—and we've got to go after him."

A murmur of dread went around the group of seamen. Kirk's hard face tightened.

"You're letting your superstitions run away with you," he rapped. "Our duty's plain. I'm going after Whieldon. Who'll go with me?"

Not one of the seamen answered. Their fear, as they peered through the moonlight over the oozy plain, was manifest.

"I'll go along, Wilson," Tony Wade said after a moment.

"Thanks, Mr. Wade," Kirk replied. "But I think you'd better stay aboard, with that pistol, just to make sure that these superstitious blockheads don't start the motors and sail off without me, while I'm gone."

The seamen dropped their heads sullenly at the lash of contempt in his voice. But none offered to accompany him as he stepped toward the rail.

Then Halsen seemed to come to a resolution.

The big Norwegian's massive face worked in the moonlight, and he stepped to Kirk's side.

"I'll go with you, sir," he said huskily. "I think it's suicide—or worse—but nobody can ever say I shirked my duty to my officers."

"Good man, Sven!" Kirk said, his tight face lighting in approval. He turned to the others, watching silently in the moonlight. "We'll be back in an hour with Whieldon, if all goes well. Whatever you do, don't follow us."

"I'm darned sure *I* won't follow you!"

declared Berty Merton emphatically. "I'm going back to sleep."

"You'd better try to sleep too, Kay—Miss Marlin," Kirk told the pale, staring girl. "Everything's going to be all right, and we'll be out of here in the morning."

A ROPE was hanging from the rail at the bow of the yacht. Obviously, Whieldon had descended by it. Kirk used it now to slide down to the surface of the slimy shore against which the yacht was aground.

His legs sank into oozy, sucking muck to his knees. As Halsen followed him, he wallowed forward, following the deep tracks left in the ooze by Captain Whieldon. The trail led straight toward the west. As Kirk followed it, he found that Whieldon had gone with uncanny sureness along a path that avoided the deeper pockets of ooze. The muck was only up to their shoe-tops in most places as he and Halsen trudged silently ahead.

The scene about them was weird in the moonlight: the rolling, undulating plain of ooze, gray-green in the pale light, extending far away; the thin veils of vapor that still steamed solemnly upward around them; and the stench of the drying muck, malodorous in their nostrils, a rank, heavy exhalation.

Kirk glimpsed the bodies of larger sea-creatures, dead and drying where they had been trapped by the rising of the land. A giant squid, its ghostly white tentacles coiled around a slimy hillock; a long, black, white-bellied bulk lying in an ooze gully, which might have been a whale.

The lights of the yacht were no longer visible behind them. And soon, standing out vague and distorted in the white moonlight, they perceived the towers of the city close ahead.

A taut silence held Kirk and the big Norwegian as they followed Whieldon's trail into the city. Death and decay seemed a tangible, brooding presence in this grotesque metropolis that had risen from the sea.

The cupola-crowned towers that looked solemnly down upon them were from forty to sixty feet in height. They seemed to have been built of huge stone blocks, but their dripping sides were still covered by green slime and trailing festoons of dank weeds. There were doors, ooze-choked entrances, in the sides of these gaunt structures, but the two men could see nothing in the dark interiors. They passed on, and Kirk became aware that they were following what had once been a long, wide avenue through the metropolis of towers.

"This place—it doesn't look as though it was ever built by men," whispered Halsen thickly.

"It *is* mighty queer architecture," Kirk muttered. "But it must be old—thousands of years old."

At the end of the avenue, a huge, slime-smeared stone dome rose squatly amid the grotesque towers. At its side, apparently attacking the dome's stone wall with a heavy steel bar, a man was visible in the moonlight.

"Whieldon!" Kirk exclaimed, with a little relief. "Come on, Sven."

"Look," whispered Halsen hoarsely, his massive face blanching in the pale light. "He's trying to get *inside* that dome."

Kirk saw, as he advanced, that the Norwegian was right. Whieldon was chipping away the stone wall around a circular metal door in the side of the domed structure.

"Whieldon, what are you doing?" Kirk cried as he and Halsen approached.

Whieldon whirled around. Intent on his work, he had not heard Kirk and his companion advancing.

He did not answer Kirk's question. But as he met their gaze in the moonlight, Kirk felt an icy horripilation of utter, gruesome dread run up his spine to his brain. Whiel-

don's face was now *completely* unhuman. That stiff, demonic mask out of which two distended black eyes swirling with malign shadows glared at them—no human face since the world began had ever looked like that!

In those glaring, alien orbs, Kirk Wilson read superhuman power whose hypnotic force made his mind stagger, and contempt and hatred that withered his courage like a killing frost.

"I told you he wasn't human!" yelled Halsen hoarsely. "Look—look at the devil in his eyes——"

"Look out!" screamed Kirk in warning.

Whieldon—or the thing that had been Whieldon — had suddenly produced a gleaming pistol, a second pistol, that he had retained when he had given the other to Tony Wade. He fired as Kirk yelled warning—and Halsen tumbled forward, dead.

With a choking cry, Kirk plunged sidewise as Whieldon shot again. The bullet sang past his head. And he glimpsed the captain's demonic face, unhumanly distended eyes glaring as he sighted the pistol in deliberate aim for his next shot.

Kirk stumbled away in frantic, zigzag flight. Two bullets smacked into the muck beside him. And then he was around the curve of the dome, shielded for the moment from Whieldon's fire, his feet plunging madly through the sucking ooze.

IN a few moments, Kirk's mind cleared a little of the horror that had seized him. He slowed to a trot, gasping for breath. He was, he found, a quarter-mile now from the dome, stumbling between the brooding, solemn towers in the bright moonlight. Only when he reached the edge of the dead city, with the open ooze-plain before him, did Kirk halt, panting.

"My God!" he husked hoarsely, breathing in great, shuddering gasps. His soul was shaking from impact of black horror. For he *knew* now that it was no mere madness that possessed Whieldon, but some black and unhuman entity that was using the captain's body as a tool.

Those terrific, glaring eyes, hell-pools of swirling, alien shadows — they had been devil's eyes, eyes of some being utterly alien to humanity. The dead Norwegian had been right—Whieldon was possessed by a demon!

Kirk looked wildly around him at the brooding towers of the oozy city, looming in the moonlight.

"A city of demons!" he whispered thickly to himself. "A city of demons from the sea!"

Kirk could no longer doubt the truth. Someone—*something*—had come up from the sea with this long-dead city of ancient Mu, something that had gripped Whieldon from afar and had through him brought the yacht to this risen land.

"The yacht!" Kirk muttered hoarsely, stumbling forward again. "Get away from here——"

That was the only thought in his horror-shaken mind as he ran unsteadily eastward, to get to the *Estrella,* to leave this hell-city from the deeps before they all succumbed to dark, malign attack.

Kirk suddenly stopped. A small figure was approaching him from ahead, coming rapidly across the moonlit plain. He waited, fists clenched, eyes wild. Then he gasped with relief as he recognized the newcomer.

It was Kay Marlin. The girl had dressed in breeches and high boots, and was running swiftly straight toward him, her face white and set in the moonlight.

"Kay!" he cried hoarsely as she approached. "What are you doing here? You've got to go back with me—we've got to get the yacht away from here, at once!"

"No, Kirk Wilson!" she answered quickly as she reached him. "We must not leave here yet."

Her voice was strangely changed. It was

no longer with her own accents that she spoke, but with a silver, clear voice as urgent as the peal of a challenging bugle.

Kirk stared at her face. It was Kay's face, but like her voice, it was—changed. Her nostrils were flaring, her features set with superhuman purpose, her whole small body rigid, determined. And her eyes were not Kay's warm, friendly brown eyes. They were dark, wide, purplish eyes astir with electric forces, eyes that met his and communicated to him the tangible shock of an imperious, blazing personality.

"Kay," he whispered incoherently, his heart growing icy cold. "You've changed —you're possessed too——"

He was shrinking from her now, shrinking with reawakened horror, with raw panic.

"No, Kirk Wilson!" she cried in that silver-stabbing voice, grasping his arm. "I who possess this girl's body am nothing evil to fear. I am Lanae!"

"Lanae?" he repeated wildly.

Then remembrance came to him, remembrance of that strange apparition in his dream, of the unhumanly beautiful girl who had endeavored to seize control of his body, and who had called herself Lanae of the Firstborn.

He remembered now that dream-image of her—the silky sea-green hair, the pale green, elfinly beautiful face, the enormous, dark purple eyes. It was Lanae's eyes that were looking at him out of Kay Marlin's face now! Eyes wide and throbbing, filled with a pulsing power, frantic with anxiety.

There was something ghastly about the thing, that Kirk shrank back with an incoherent cry. But Kay—or Lanae—held to his arm.

"You must not fear, Kirk Wilson!" she cried. "I mean no harm to you, nor to this girl whose body I seized as she slept. I *had* to have a body to use, if I am to defeat the evil purposes of Arn."

"Arn?" he stammered hoarsely, remembering how she had spoken that name in his dream. "Who is Arn? And who are you?"

"I am Lanae of the Firstborn." It was Kay's lips speaking, but the tragic undertone of haunting memory in that silver voice was not Kay's. "My body lies sleeping in that great dome at the center of this city—sleeping beside the body of Arn. For he and I are the last of the Firstborn."

"But who were the Firstborn?" Kirk asked hoarsely. "You are not human——"

"Not human, no," Lanae answered swiftly. "Arn and I are the last members of a race that dwelt in the dawn-ages of Earth, before ever man appeared. That race, the Firstborn, attained to power and knowledge far surpassing any that man has won. For ages unthinkable to you, the Firstborn were lords of this Earth.

"THEN evolved and appeared the races of man. They increased rapidly in numbers. They painfully won some measure of knowledge and civilization, and they established on this land the country of Mu. By that time, nearly all of my own people, the ancient Firstborn, had wearied of life and passed willingly to death. Only Arn and I remained of our race.

"Arn and I, because of our vast powers and illimitable wisdom, were looked upon as gods by the people of Mu. That great dome was our temple, in which we dwelt. And from it, Arn ruled the land of Mu with a rod of iron, for he thought these humans no more than groveling animals to serve his purposes. Yes, and Arn *still* thinks that, Kirk Wilson, and seeks to fasten his merciless tyranny again upon the race of man!"

Kirk gasped at the startling assertion, but Lanae continued quickly before he could speak.

"But I, Lanae, liked and pitied the struggling races of humanity. I taught the people of Mu many things, so that their

scientific power and knowledge became very great—far greater, indeed, than any human race possesses today. And I tried to persuade Arn to moderate the harsh severity of his rule, but he mocked and derided me because of my sympathy for our human subjects.

"Finally Arn's rule of the Murians became so tyrannically merciless that they would endure it no longer. They rose against us—yes, all the people of Mu came and attacked us, seeking to destroy Arn.

"I pleaded with Arn, 'Soften the harshness of your rule, and let us be the teachers and not the tyrants of this new race of men, and live with them in friendship.'

"But Arn answered my plea with a cold, disdainful smile.

" 'You were always soft-hearted toward these half-apes, Lanae,' he told me. 'They are fit only to serve us, and I shall never allow them to cast off my yoke.'

" 'What, then, will you do?' I demanded. 'They will never cease rebelling against you, now.'

"Arn smiled icily. 'These Murians have gleaned too much power from your teaching, Lanae,' he declared. 'I am going to shatter their civilization once and for all, so that men hereafter will not have power enough to rebel against me.'

"Then he unfolded his dreadful plan. He meant to loose vast geogonic forces beneath the land of Mu, that would cause the whole continent to sink into the sea, and thus destroy the civilization of the rebellious Murians for ever.

" 'And then we too shall perish, if you carry out that ghastly plan!' I cried. 'Or is it your idea that we should leave this, the ancient homeland of the Firstborn, and take up life in the other, savage lands?'

" 'We will not leave this land, and neither shall we die,' Arn answered me. 'We two shall lie down here to sleep in our temple, as the land sinks, and we shall sleep away a few thousand years in suspended animation, beneath the sea. At the end of ten millenniums, I have calculated, the land will rise again, and then we shall rule the new human races, who will not have the powers and science to resist us which, thanks to your folly, these Murians possess.'

" 'Your plan is black and sinful!' I cried. 'We of the Firstborn have lived out our day, and the Earth belongs of right to these new human races. It were better that we two passed to death, than to slay all this people. I will not allow you to do it, Arn!'

" 'You cannot prevent me, Lanae,' Arn answered coldly. 'I still possess powers greater than yours.'

"And with those powers, Arn held me a helpless prisoner in the temple, while he made preparations for his dark scheme.

"Then, on a day that is terrible in my memory, Arn loosed the forces he had prepared. And the land of Mu began to shake and quiver, and slip downward into the sea. And as that subsidence began, Arn closed the door of the temple, and forced me to lie down in one of the two sepulchers he had prepared.

"THE land was shaking and sinking, as he closed the lid of my sepulcher. And then the gas inside it that suspends all vital processes overcame me, and my body slept. And for ten thousand years since then, my body has slept like Arn's, in the city beneath the sea. But my mind was free in that time—free to roam the wide universe.

"At last, after that vast space of time that to me seemed but brief, this land rose again as Arn had foreseen. But our bodies did not wake, for they could not wake until our sepulchers were opened, and that could only be done by someone from outside.

"Arn cast his mind forth and grasped the captain of your craft, and forced him to come hither, and to come alone to this city, so that he might force open the temple

and the sepulcher and revive Arn's body. And if he does that, Arn himself, in his own body, will come forth from that sepulcher, living and powerful, ready to impose his relentless tyranny upon your races, who have not the power to rebel that the Murians had.

"Yes, if Arn's sepulcher is opened tonight, nothing can save your world from that awful tyranny. And to prevent that black evil from happening, I, Lanae, in desperation tried to seize your body tonight as you slept. For only a sleeping man or woman, whose mind temporarily relaxes its rule, can be seized mentally by Arn or myself.

"You, Kirk Wilson, resisted and escaped my mental attack. So, but now, I seized the body of this girl as she slept. For I—we—must prevent your possessed captain from opening the sepulcher of Arn, or your world is lost!"

Kirk felt as though he were caught in a hideous nightmare, as he heard that dreadful warning from the girl's lips. Lanae of the Firstborn, daughter of a race preceding man, speaking to him through the lips of Kay Marlin, warning him of ghastly peril!

She caught his arm. "We must be quick!" she cried. "Even now, the man Whieldon whom Arn possesses may have opened the temple."

In Kirk's mind rose a wild desire to flee this hideous place and peril, to get to the yacht, to escape from this haunted land. But he fought it down.

"All right," he said hoarsely. "I'll help you, Kay—Lanae——"

Without further words, she grasped his arm, and started back through the slime-smeared city.

When they came into sight of the great dome, squat and brooding in the moonlight, she clutched his arm with fierce quickness.

"See—he opens the temple now!" she hissed.

Kirk stiffened. For ahead, he could perceive Whieldon, working like a madman, clearing away broken stone from around the circular metal door in the temple's side.

"In a moment he will have opened it!" whispered Lanae's urgent voice from Kay's lips. "He must be stopped—now!"

THEY moved stealthily forward. And as they did so, they saw Whieldon tugging at something beside the door. The door swung solemnly aside, with a grating rasp.

There was a shout of triumph from Whieldon—or from the creature who possessed Whieldon's body.

"Now—seize him!" came Kirk's companion's frantic whisper.

But at that moment, as though warned by more than human senses, Whieldon whirled around, snatching out his pistol.

The stiff, set face and devil-haunted eyes of the possessed captain widened in amazement as he looked into the frantic, purplish eyes of Kay Marlin.

"Lanae!" shouted Whieldon. And then hell-flames seemed to leap in his eyes. "So you seized a body also—you thought to thwart me even now?"

"I did, Arn—and I *will* thwart your evil plans." Kay's silver, unhuman voice flamed. "You shall not go forth to fasten your black rule again upon the races of men."

"Ho-ho!" laughed Arn in Whieldon's voice. "You are too late, Lanae! For I need only to slay this body you possess, and this human fool whom you have allied yourself with, and then your mind must return to your own sleeping body, inside your sepulcher."

The gun in his hand swept up, leveled at Kay's figure. And in that moment, Kirk dived wildly forward.

Arn, in his scorn for everything human, had underestimated Kirk's potentialities. He swung his gun toward the charging first mate—but too late. The bullet that spat

from it tore over Kirk's head, and in the next moment, Kirk had struck Whieldon's body and knocked him sprawling into the ooze. Whieldon struggled like a wildcat, driven by the unhuman creature who controlled him. It was not Whieldon he was fighting, Kirk knew, but Arn of the First-born!

But Kirk was stronger, younger, than the captain. He smashed in one wild blow after another, until one connected with Whieldon's chin. The captain's struggles ceased, his head lolled back senseless.

Kay came running up to where Kirk crouched panting on his unconscious antagonist.

"Bind him, quickly!" she ordered in Lanae's silver voice.

Clumsily, Kirk bound Whieldon's hands behind him with his own belt. He had hardly done so, when Whieldon opened his eyes. The black devil-flames in them were appalling as he stared ragingly up at Kay.

"So you think you have beaten me, Lanae!" he hissed. "You fool, you shall soon see!"

And then, before Kirk's eyes, a change came over Whieldon's face, an abrupt metamorphosis.

The captain's face lost that stiff, unhuman expression, his raging eyes lost their alien, dreadful expression. He was, suddenly, just the genial mariner Kirk had always known, lying and staring up at them, bewildered.

"What—what's happened?" he asked incoherently, staring wildly around the oozy, moonlit city.

"Where am I?"

"Whieldon, don't you remember anything?" Kirk said.

The captain shook his head dazedly. "All I remember is that big wave that hit the yacht. It knocked me cold, and I've had a nightmare—something about someone else inside my body——"

Kay's set face twisted in sharp alarm, her unhuman, purplish eyes widened.

"Arn has left this man's body!" she cried. "He knows we have this body a helpless prisoner now, and so he will try to seize another body! If anyone on your craft is sleeping, Arn can seize him——"

"What shall we do?" Kirk cried wildly.

"We must awake my own body, inside the temple!" she cried. "Once my own body is awake, in it I can destroy Arn's own body before he can grip another human, and his life will then be ended for ever."

"Why am I tied up like this?" Whieldon was asking dazedly.

Kirk bent to untie him, but Kay's small hands pulled him fiercely back.

"No!" she cried. "If you release him, Arn might be able to seize control of him again, even now that he is awake. Leave him here!"

She dragged Kirk to his feet, and through the now open door of the great dome-temple.

IT WAS absolutely lightless inside the structure. But as Kirk stood, unable to see anything, he heard Kay fumbling at the wall near by. There was a soft clicking sound, and strange, sourceless white light sprang into being inside the dome, illuminating its whole interior.

Kirk stared. The whole interior of the dome was a single vast chamber. In it was no ooze or slime, no trace of the waters that had for so long covered the city outside. The floor and curving walls were of smooth, pale stone, and around the edges of the room were stone chests of great size.

At the center of the enormous chamber was a low stone dais, and on it lay two big objects that flashed and glittered in the light—two oblong caskets of a glass-like, transparent substance.

Kay's hand drew him swiftly toward these. And as they stepped upon the dais,

as Kirk looked down into the transparent sepulchers, he uttered a strangled cry.

"It is *me* you see—my body, and in that other sepulcher lies Arn!" Kay exclaimed, in Lanae's voice.

In one of the sepulchers, indeed, lay the body of—Lanae! She was as Kirk had seen her in his dream, her slim and sinuously unhuman body wrapped in a silken robe of white, her pale green, elfin face composed and still in sleep, sea-green hair flowing back from her broad, low forehead.

Lanae of the Firstborn, sleeping as she had slept since the day Mu had sunk beneath the waves ten thousand years ago! But only Lanae's sleeping *body,* Kirk knew —her mind possessed and activated the girl who stood beside him.

In the other transparent sepulcher lay Arn. And Kirk shuddered as he looked at last upon the true face of the tyrant of ancient Mu, who had for so many hours possessed Whieldon's body.

The pale green face of Arn was dreadful; not hideous in outline, for its features were long, regular, almost handsome, but the thinness of those lips, the high, arched nose, the harsh outlines of chin and cheeks, the stamp of remorseless and merciless power on that long, thin face, were appalling. Arn, too, slept wrapped in a long white robe.

Kay's small figure had leaped to the coffin of Lanae, toward the head of it, where little metal studs jutted from the transparent material.

"Now shall I awake my own body," she declared. "And once in it, I shall destroy Arn's body before he can wreak more evil upon Earth."

She touched one of the metal studs, and a strange, rosy light began to glow inside the casket of the sleeping Lanae.

She touched another stud. With a thin hiss, air began to filter into the casket.

"In a moment," she cried, "my own body will awake! I shall leave this girl's body now, and return to my own. Wait, and touch nothing."

"I'll wait," Kirk said shakenly.

And then, swiftly, he saw a change come over Kay—a change as strange and unnerving, as that which had metamorphosed Whieldon.

KAY'S set white face softened, relaxed in outline. Her enormous purplish eyes contracted, changed color and expression. And abruptly, her face was the familiar, normal face of Kay herself.

Dazed, utterly uncomprehending, she stared from Kirk Wilson around the vast, white-lit dome.

"Kirk!" she screamed. "What's happened to me? How did I get to this place?"

"Quiet, Kay," he answered tensely, his arm around her quivering shoulders.

He was looking into the sepulcher of Lanae. And Kay's shuddering figure stiffened as she too perceived the incredibly beautiful and alien green girl sleeping in that casket. But Lanae's sinuous body was stirring, inside the sepulcher. Her arms moved in rippling little gestures, and then her eyes opened. Those great, purple orbs looked up immediately toward Kirk.

"Kirk!" screamed Kay horrifiedly, clinging wildly to him.

"It's all right, Kay," he told her tensely. And swiftly, in few words, he related what had happened. "Lanae is in her own body now, and she is going to destroy Arn before his mind can seize another human tool."

Lanae, in the casket, had stretched out her hand toward a stud on the inside of the transparent substance. As she turned it, the whole top of the casket suddenly vanished in a flash of light.

And Lanae rose swiftly out of the sepulcher, her white-robed body moving toward them with swift and sinuous grace.

Kay shrank from her terrified, and shuddering violently.

"Fear not, girl!" Lanae's own silver voice reassured her. And to Kirk she added quickly, "Now must I be swift. Follow me."

She led the way, with that quick, undulating graceful movement, toward the edge of the vast domed room, where the huge stone chests were ranged. Kirk followed numbly, his arm around the frightened Kay.

Lanae was raising the massive lid of one of the chests, as though it had no weight whatever. Inside the chest, Kirk Wilson saw a bewildering mass of grotesquely unfamiliar instruments and mechanisms.

"*This* is what I need!" pealed Lanae's triumphant accents, as she drew an object out of the chest.

It was a silver tripod a yard high, upon which was mounted a slender silver tube like a surveyor's transit. Quickly, her elfin face tense, Lanae turned the tube so that it pointed straight toward the dais where rested the sepulcher of Arn.

As her green, nailless fingers deftly adjusted control-screws upon the slender tube, she called a warning to the man and girl watching her.

"Now stand well off behind me," she warned, "for the forces I am about to loose are terrible ones. Yes, only in my own body, that can withstand the aura of such forces, would I dare use this instrument. If you humans are too near when I operate it, you will be withered and slain."

Kirk, dazedly obedient, drew Kay with him, away from Lanae, toward the rear of the vast chamber.

"A moment more," whispered Lanae tautly as she rapidly adjusted the control-screws, "a moment more, and Arn and his evil lust for power will be gone for ever——"

"Too late, traitress to the Firstborn!" yelled a hoarse, terrible voice from the entrance of the temple.

Kirk's gaze flashed toward the open door. In it stood—Berty Merton, the pudgy, kewpie-faced richman's son whom he had left on the yacht. But it was not Merton's face that glared in unhuman, diabolical triumph at Lanae, as she stood frozen at her instrument. It was not Merton's eyes that flamed with demonic passion. That raging, alien face, those hell-haunted, flaming eyes . . .

"*Arn!*" cried Lanae, her elfin face wild and desperate.

"Yes, it is Arn, traitress!" thundered Merton, advancing. "You thought to slay me, destroy me, before I could find another body. But you are too late, for already I have seized the body of this sleeping human, and have rushed here in it to destroy *you!*"

Kirk's blood roared in his ears. He understood the incredible catastrophe to Lanae's plans.

Arn, releasing control of Whieldon's body when the captain was overpowered, had seized control of the sleeping Merton on the yacht, and had caused Merton's body to rush here to thwart Lanae's scheme.

Kirk plunged madly forward. If he could overpower Merton, as he had Whieldon . . .

Merton's chubby hand flashed up, and only then did Kirk see the knife the pudgy youth held. It flashed through the air like a beam of light, and Kirk felt a shock of blinding pain as the blade tore deep into him below his shoulder.

Kirk staggered, fell to his knees. Kay was screaming, bending over him. But Kirk raised his head, tried to gain his feet, and could not.

Merton and Lanae were facing each other. And the flaming eyes of Arn, in Merton's demonic face, were clashing with Lanae's purple eyes, holding her frozen with her hand rigid upon the silver tube of her deadly instrument.

Neither of the two moved a muscle. It was the deadliest of combats, silent, imma-

terial, a conflict to the death between two superhumanly powerful minds.

Kirk saw Lanae's blazing purple eyes *wavering* under the terrific mental attack of Arn—wavering, weakening, her hand dropping from the silver tripod.

INFERNAL triumph flamed up in Merton's distended eyes—triumph of Arn as he beat down Lanae's resistance.

Suddenly a hoarse cry stabbed from the door of the vast chamber. Tony Wade stood there, hatless, bleeding from a knife-slash on the cheek, his pistol raised toward Merton.

Merton's pudgy figure whirled sharply around at that cry from behind him. And as he turned, as Arn's terrific gaze was withdrawn from her for an instant, Lanae's hand darted instantly toward the silver tripod and tube.

A terrific bolt of blue lightning burst from the tube and hit Merton's chubby figure squarely, at the very moment that he was turning back, and his whole body disappeared in a flash of azure flame.

Kirk saw Lanae swiftly swing the silver tripod-tube toward the transparent casket in which the body of Arn himself lay sleeping. And another blue bolt leaped forth, and the sepulcher and body of Arn flamed and vanished.

"It is done," said Lanae in a strangely hushed silver voice. "The body of Arn and the mind of Arn are destroyed—for ever."

"My God!" choked Tony Wade, staring wildly. "What has happened here? I followed Berty here—he'd suddenly waked up on the yacht and had gone crazy—had seized a knife and slashed me when I tried to keep him from coming to this city. But what——"

"A danger to humanity is gone," husked Kirk, swaying on his feet against Kay's trembling figure. "A hideous and awful danger."

Lanae spoke. She still stood beside the silver tripod, and her elfin, alien face was strangely set, her purple eyes deep with unguessable emotion.

"I have destroyed the last of the First-born except myself," she whispered. "Yes, the last of the great race. It was well to do it, for Arn's purposes were evil. But now I am the final, solitary survivor of a vanished people."

She swung toward Kirk and Kay Marlin.

"Go, humans," she whispered to them. "Go from this city—swiftly. An end comes tonight to many things."

"But Lanae——" Kirk said hoarsely.

Her raised arm, pointing toward the door, silenced him.

"You have helped me loyally, man of the new race," she whispered to him. "If you would live—leave now."

Kay was urging him toward the door, supporting his reeling figure against herself.

As they reached the door, Kirk looked back. The white-robed figure of Lanae was still standing by the silver tripod. She was not looking after them, but was gazing at the dais that had borne the two sepulchers.

They stumbled out into the moonlight. Tony Wade hastily unbound the bewildered Whieldon, who still lay outside. And then all four of them hurried forward through the city of brooding towers, Kirk staggering between the two men.

They reached the end of the grotesque, slimed city, and stumbled on across the oozy plain. The moon was declining toward the west, now. In a few minutes they sighted the lights of the yacht.

And then a terrific light flared behind them, and a great burst of wind smote them. They turned. And Kirk cried out as he saw the whole city behind them wrapped in a blinding sheet of blue flame, like a sea of lightning.

The eye-aching blue flare throbbed for a moment, then vanished. And with it,

they saw when their dazzled eyes regained vision, had vanished the whole city from the sea, the towers and temple of dead Mu. There was only a great depression in the oozy plain, where the city had been.

"Lanae!" cried Kay. "She used that instrument to destroy the whole city—and herself——"

"Yes," whispered Kirk. "She was the last of her race, and she didn't want to live on in this new world. And she took with her into death the city where she and Arn ruled, ten thousand years ago."

The lights of the *Estrella* were bright, yellow, warm and friendly beacons ahead of them, as they stumbled on. And in the east, the sky was paling with dawn.

An hour later, its Diesels throbbing, the yacht had been reversed off of the muck shore. Tensely, Whieldon steered it out through the rocks and shoals outside the cove, Kirk sitting, his shoulder bandaged, calling bearings to him as he remembered them from the inward passage.

Then, after taut moments, they were clear of the shoals, heading northward across the open sea whose rippling surface stretched blue and peaceful to the horizon. The low, gray-green, oozy coast receded rapidly behind them.

"The whole world will be coming down here to look at this new land from the sea," Tony Wade declared. "But they'll never, any of them, believe when we tell what happened here."

"We won't ever tell them—it would be useless," Kirk Wilson answered. "We can only say that we ran aground here, and that Halsen and Merton lost their lives in an accident ashore. We'll have to forget all the rest."

Kay, sitting close beside Kirk, turned her wide eyes from the receding coast, and with a shiver, pressed her dark head against his unhurt shoulder.

And the yacht throbbed on toward the north, over a tranquil sea turned golden by the light of the rising sun.

# Hell

*Modern day Fausts raise hell among the skyscrapers of Manhattan — and conjure up daemons in the heart of downtown New York!*

"She stood surrounded by the bobbing, weaving shapes . . ."

### *1. Devil's Brew*

"LET me ask you a question," said my visitor. "Would you go to hell for ten thousand dollars?"

"Brother, just show me the money and tell me when the next train leaves," I told him.

# On Earth

*HIGH VOLTAGE NOVELETTE OF SATAN IN TUXEDO—*

BY ROBERT BLOCH

**". . . and behind her was caged the figure of Satan!"**

"I'm serious."

I sat back and did my goldfish imitation —staring with my mouth open. I'm pretty good at it.

But Professor Keith was pretty good at looking serious. Too good. After a minute I closed my mouth and just stared.

"Wait a minute," I said. "You haven't got a cloven hoof. You didn't appear out of a cloud of smoke. You're not crazy, and you don't take drugs. You're Professor Phillips Keith, Associate Director of Rocklynn Institute. And you're offering me ten thousand dollars to go to hell."

The pudgy little man with the graying hair adjusted his spectacles and smiled. He looked for all the world like a kindly bishop as he answered, "I'd rather see you go to hell for me than anyone else."

"That's very flattering of you, I'm sure. But, Professor—perhaps you could explain yourself a little more fully before I decide. A man doesn't get an offer like this every day."

Plump fingers held out a newspaper clipping. "Read this."

*SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE TO BECOME WITCHCRAFT DEN*

The world-famous Rocklynn Institute will be transformed into a rendezvous for goblins and demons, according to the plans of Thomas M. Considine, wealthy philanthropist.

Considine has authorized a donation of $50,000 to be used in what he describes as a "scientific study of sorcery and Black Magic."

Professor Phillips Keith today announced that Rocklynn Institute is "seriously contemplating" the possibilities of the project. Scientific basis for ancient magic is by no means improbable, Keith declared, and such a study may yield valuable results.

Vendors of black cats, dried toads, and love-philtres might find it worth their while to apply at the Rocklynn Institute in the near future.

"Lousy piece of writing," I commented, handing the clipping back to Keith. "Now, what's the real story?"

Keith rose.

"Why not come along with me and find out for yourself?" he asked.

"Don't mind if I do." I grabbed my hat and followed Keith down to the waiting car. We weaved into traffic before I broke the silence again.

"So it's no gag, then," I mused. "Not just a publicity stunt. You're really going through with something like this?"

The eyes behind the spectacles were penetrating in their gray intensity. "I've never been more serious about anything in my life," declared Keith.

"It was I who badgered Thomas Considine into donating that money. For years it has been my ambition to conduct experiments along this line. Too bad the papers got hold of the story—but from now on there will be no publicity. No one must know that Rocklynn Institute is attempting to raise the dead and conjure up daemons in the heart of downtown New York."

Now if there is one thing I have learned in this Vale of Tears, it's this—you don't tell a man he's crazy when he has fifty thousand dollars to spend. Particularly if he has just offered you ten thousand of that fifty.

So all I said was, "That's fine. But where do I fit into this picture?"

Keith smiled, as he swung the car towards a parking lot.

"Simple. Your name was given to me as a writer of so-called horror-fiction. As such I expect you to be more or less conversant with demonology and witchcraft lore."

"Right. But I certainly don't believe such bunk."

"Exactly! That's my point—while you are in a position to understand what we're attempting, you still don't believe. In other words, you are an average, skeptical representative of John Public. That's why you were chosen to act as official eye-witness and historian of our endeavors. You know what's going on, but you don't believe in it. You will be shown. In other words, you're being hired as a witness."

"You mean ten thousand dollars for standing around and watching you play witch? Ten grand to see you ride a broomstick?"

Keith laughed. "You're almost too skeptical. Come on. I think you need an immediate example."

We entered the skyscraper, purred upwards in the private elevator, stepped briskly across the business-like outer lobby of Rocklynn Institute's spacious quarters on the penthouse floor. Keith led me along the hall to a door marked *Private*.

He pushed it open, beckoned.

Usually I hate such doors. I hate the smugness of their curt warning. *Private!*

But if ever a door deserved such a marking, this one did. For it barred madness.

BLACK madness, in a velvet draped room. Red madness, in the flickering braziers winking demonic eyes from shadowy niches.

We stood in a dark chamber, hidden in the topmost recesses of a modern skyscraper—a dark chamber, reeking of blood, musk, hashish, and the tomb.

It was a room torn from the Fifteenth Century, a room torn from ancient dreams.

True, the tables and shelvings were modern, but they groaned with the impedimenta of forgotten nightmares. I looked down at the first ledge beside me, and a casual glance convinced.

A rack of test-tubes reared from the surface. Modern Pyrex, but labeled with inscriptions old as wizardry. "Bat's blood." "Mandrake root." "Deadly nightshade." "Mummy dust." "Corpse fat." And worse. Much worse.

There were shiny new refrigerators in one corner, but they bulged with unnamable carcasses. There were queerly bubbling vats near a small open fire. One long shelf held alchemic instruments. Jars of herbs stood amidst vials of powdered bones. The floor was crisscrossed with pentagons and zodiacal designs drawn in blue chalk, phosphorescent paint, and some substance that yielded a dull, rusty red.

One wall held books—books I didn't like. The light gleamed on musty tomes once hugged to the withered bosoms of witches, once grasped by the bony, trembling talons of long-dead necromancers.

For just an instant I stood at Professor Keith's side, as the iron door closed behind us. For just an instant my eyes ran their spidery pattern across the red glare and black shadow of that room.

And then something rose out of the farther gloom, something wheeled and scuttled from the darkness, something moved in shroud-white silence across the floor.

I jumped two feet.

"Meet Doctor Ross," said Keith.

"Ulp!" I commented.

Doctor Ross's oval face moved toward me. A slim hand darted out. "Charmed," said Doctor Ross.

"Ulp!" I declared again.

"Can't you say anything but 'Ulp'?" inquired Doctor Ross, with some curiosity.

"Well, you'd 'Ulp' too if you were dragged into a chamber of horrors and had a zombie come at you and the zombie turned out to be a pretty girl with—"

I stopped. But it had slipped out, and I wasn't too sorry. Because Doctor Ross was a remarkably attractive young lady. Her blond hair was not marred by any medical severity of coiffure, and her piquant features were very adequately rouged and decorated. Even the white surgical gown did not wholly conceal features which would make Will Hays foam at the mouth if he saw her in a sweater.

"Thank you," said Doctor Ross, without embarrassment. "And welcome to Rocklynn Institute. I presume you are interested in witchcraft?"

"If all witches are like you—" I began, but Keith cut me off.

"Lily Ross isn't Circe, you know," he remarked, but his eyes twinkled. "And you aren't being hired to pass out compliments. There's work to do. We've got a demon to raise this afternoon."

Right then and there it stopped being funny.

Here I was, yanked into a weird chamber atop a skyscraper, in the hands of two lunatics whose avowed purpose was to experiment in Black Magic, and ordered to stand by and watch them evoke a demon. It was confusing, to say the least. In my agitation I stepped back a foot and bumped into something that clicked. I turned around, stared into the grinning visage of a dangling skeleton, and uttered my familiar "Ulp!"

I got my voice back at once. "Now look here—are you really serious about all this?"

Keith took a sheaf of papers from his pocket and placed them on a table near an inverted crucifix bearing the impaled body of a dried bat, hanging head downwards. He produced a fountain pen, waved me over.

"Sign," he ordered.

"Sign what?"

"The contract. Calling for your services as eye-witness for three months. Ten thousand dollars. Five now, five at the conclusion of our experiments. Serious enough for you?"

"Very." My fingers trembled as I scribbled a signature on both sets of contracts. They fairly shook with palsy as Professor Keith extended his check. Five thousand dollars right now! It was quite serious, no doubt about that.

"Well, then." Keith pocketed the papers. "Are we all ready to proceed, Lily?"

"Everything is in order, Professor," said the girl.

"Then draw the Pentagram," purred Keith. "You'll find the blood in the refrigerator still fresh enough. Recite the chant and light the fires, my dear. And don't worry—I'll keep you covered with the revolvers. If anything goes wrong I'll shoot to kill."

With a bland smile, Phillips Keith drew two guns from his vest holster and leveled them into the darkness of the curtained room.

*2. Up Pops—*

"SILVER bullets in here," explained Professor Keith. "Very good against vampires, werewolves, vrykolas, or ghouls. Don't know how effective they are against a draconibus, though."

"What?"

"A draconibus. Flying cacodemon of the night. Sort of an incubus. If Abbot Richalmus is correct. We're using his spell from *"Liber Revelationum de Insidia et Versutiis Daemonum Adversus Homines."* He says the things are black and scaly, quite human in appearance except for the wings and fangs, but on a low order of intelligence. Something like the elementals. If the bullets don't work, there's always the Pentagram. You know what it is; a five-pointed star, two angles ascendant and one pointed down. It represents Satan, Goat of the Sabbath."

"Are you crazy?" I had to say it.

"See here." Keith's face was stern in the red glare. "We might as well understand each other once and for all. I don't mind your skepticism in the least, but please don't cast doubts on my sanity or sincerity."

"But it all seems too absurd—mingling science and sorcery."

"Why?" Keith snapped. "Yesterday's magic is today's scientific fact. Voodoo witch doctors and medieval savants tried to cast out demons. Today psychiatrists attempt to cure insanity by hypnosis, suggestion, and shock treatments, in almost the same way.

"Once alchemists attempted to transmute base metals into gold. Today that effort constitutes the basis of scientific research along identical lines.

"Are not scientists attempting to find the Elixir of Youth in their laboratories, using

animal and human blood in their experiments like the mages of old?

"Don't scientists concern themselves with the vital problems of Life and Death —and keep chicken hearts and dog heads alive when severed from the dead bodies?

"Men died for that at the stake in ages past. They died for dealing with the very mysteries we scientists now openly attempt to probe. Science is sorcery, I tell you—except that in some cases, the ancient wizards might have been more *successful.*"

"You mean that you believe thaumaturgists once actually did revive the dead and call upon elementals?"

"I mean they tried to do it and may well have succeeded. I mean there was nothing wrong with their theories, but their methods were at fault. And I mean that modern science can take those same theories, apply the proper methods, and meet with complete success. That's what we're going to do."

"But—"

"Watch."

I watched. The slim figure of Lily Ross weaved a white pattern across the far side of the black chamber. Flame blossomed in her fingers as she bent over the braziers in the niches and re-kindled their dying fires. From a pouch at her waist she scattered fine dust upon the embers.

The fires flared upward—not red now, but green and blue and purple. A kaleidoscope of diabolic luminance flooded the vast room.

Red tongues rose from candle tips and lapped at the darkness. Thick, bloated candles, like the puffy fingers of a gigantically swollen corpse—thick, bloated candles, fed by a slim white priestess.

White witch!

SHE stooped over and drew a silvery design upon the floor, and its five luminous points were bathed with a crimson fluid poured from a canister.

"Blood," whispered Keith. "Type B blood."

"Type B?"

"Naturally. Didn't I tell you we were using modern scientific methods in witchcraft?

"Let's get down to cases. Sorcery in the Middle Ages was almost a racket. The average goetist was a charlatan. Some wizards hung around the courts of small nobles or petty princes, dabbling in astrology and palmistry, and fawning on their patrons like court jesters. They were arrant fakes.

"Others were like modern confidence men, forever asking money to perfect wild plans of transmuting lead to gold, completing an Elizir of Youth, or finding the Philosopher's stone. Just grafters.

"A third class were quack doctors—boys who took little shops in the side streets and sold phony love philtres, promised to put curses on enemies for a small fee, and attempted to cure everything from epilepsy to the French disease.

"Mixed in with these impostors were the psycopathic cases. Demonomaniacs and diaboleptics who pranced naked on the hilltops during Walpurgis Eve, claimed to ride broomsticks to the moon, or converse with the dead, and have infernal lovers. Inverted religious mania.

"But always there were serious students of the mantic arts. From their records—their spells and incantations—we are working here."

Keith pointed toward the bookshelves. "It took me years to gather this collection. Manuscripts, parchments, fragments from treatises, secret documents from every country and every age. Much of it is locked away in those files. In cunabula. Cost a small fortune, but worth it."

"But aren't they filled with the same fake gibberish as all the rest?" I objected. "I've read some of that stuff, and it's usually pretty silly."

"True. But there are kernels of truth. It's easy to discern. Some of the spells are known frauds; others are genuine."

"You mean if you read a spell aloud that it might conjure up a ghoul or a ghost?"

"If you read it *correctly,*" answered Keith. "There's the whole point. That's where science steps in.

"In many cases the spell has not been set down completely, due to fear. In other instances, the incantation has certain word changes, due to imperfect translations, or incorrect interpretation of the medieval Latin or Greek. The Church burned as much of the genuine stuff as could be found over centuries of time. We've had to spend months of preparation—weeding the genuine from the spurious, piecing together fragments, studying contemporary sources. It's been a lengthy job for Doctor Ross and myself, but we're now assured of one thing—we have on hand nearly one hundred actual, authentic incantations for the evocation of supernatural forces. If spoken correctly, the proper vibrations will be set up as in ordinary prayer, and responses will be made.

"Also, some of these incantations require ceremonies, such as this one. We've spent a goodly sum acquiring the necessary instruments and materials for our experiments. It's hard to buy a Hand of Glory, or baboon's blood; hard to secure enough cadavers. Grisly, too—but important."

I shrugged. "But Class B blood?"

"Merely an illustration of our thoroughness. We're going to attack the supernatural with modern aid. Consider the reasons for the failure of ancient sorcerers.

"For one thing, as I pointed out, many were admitted fakes. And serious students often got hold of the wrong translations, as I have demonstrated. Naturally, they didn't succeed.

"Again, they were balked by lack of proper materials. If the spell called for baboon's blood, they might have had to use the blood of a rhesus monkey, for example. It spoiled the mixture, by simple chemistry. We're experimenting, when we use human blood, with all blood types—because it might well be that a spell only works with a specific chemical compound. That's something the ancients didn't know.

"Similarly, they often were taken in by frauds. Perhaps they attempted brewing a philtre calling for 'powdered unicorn's horn.' Naturally, when *we* see such a recipe, we know it's a fake and throw it out. They weren't so fortunate, and again they failed.

"So there you are. It may look like hocus-pocus to you, but it's the result of applied scientific reasoning. We've sifted our spells, we've checked our formulae, we've gathered together only the most authentic ingredients, we're working by trial and error and modern logic.

"Under such conditions we cannot fail, if there is any truth in the supernatural lore which has dominated all nations and all religion since the dawn of Time.

"SURELY there is a basis of truth underlying this tremendous mass of legend and theory that is older than any other form of worship. Science has recognized today the pathological existence of the vampire and werewolf and ghoul in mental cases. Science has recognized today many practises which were once called witchcraft. Now we shall take the further step and discover whether the ancients were wiser than we knew. We shall reconstruct—correctly—the enchantments of the magicians and evocators.

"Today, using Class B blood, we are performing the Richalmus rune to evoke a draconibus. Doctor Ross has drawn the Pentagram. She has placed the five candles at the points, and fed the fires with the Three Colors.

"Now she will read the invocation in

the original Latin. If the conditions are reproduced correctly, we shall soon see the veritable flying daemon of the night which the good Abbot describes so graphically. Mayhap we shall capture it and offer our living proof to the world."

"You'll *capture* it?" I murmured.

Keith smiled. "Why not? That's the kind of evidence we need to confound the smug skeptics, the pompous figures who delight in shaming poor old women at seances and ridiculing sincere students of the occult. Why, when Tom Considine put up the money for all this, he laughed at me! I wonder what he'd say if I sent a draconibus into the office in a packing-case."

Keith chuckled as he pointed at the ceiling.

"Of course, if the thing does appear, and is dangerous, I've got the silver bullets to stop it. But I'd much prefer to take my apparitions alive. There's the scientific means."

I followed his directing finger. Suspended by chains in the shadowy heights above was a square sheet of transparent glass.

It hung directly over the spot where the Pentagram gleamed upon the floor.

"Notice the lever at the door," Keith said. "Turn that, and the glass cage drops down. Fits over whatever appears in the circle, fits like a cage."

"But your demon would surely break out of it at once," I said, half-ashamed at even using the word.

"Not from that," Keith assured me. "There are repelling crosses ground into the glass itself—including the crux ansantor. Tubes of holy water in the paneling along the sides. Besides, it's the modern 'unbreakable' glass, for added precaution, and there's a little tubing at the top which extends inside. It admits air—and it can also admit enough monoxide to turn that glass cage into a lethal chamber within thirty seconds. So if anything appears, just you pull that lever."

So there it was. I stood in the dark chamber as the white witch wove her spell, and heard the wizard instruct me on the fine art of demon-catching. If it hadn't been for that five thousand dollar check in my pocket, I'd have quit there.

Not because it was silly.

Because it was serious. Too serious. Keith had spoken wildly, but he had spoken with conviction. He was Professor Phillips Keith, associate director of a recognized scientific institute. He was a known scholar and savant, not a crackpot eccentric.

Lily Ross was nobody's fool, I felt—and she wasn't giggling behind her hand, either. She was going about her preparations like a trained scientific assistant. *Or a witch.*

Witchcraft! The Black Arts of legend, the hideous whisperings creeping throughout history and leering madly through all barriers of reasons. Satanism, the Black Mass, trafficking with the dead and the masters of the dead.

Here in this room, the reek of the grave. The corpse-fat candles, and the flames that burned with a blue light, a green lividity, a purple pallor. Blood trickling across an ancient symbol on the floor. Silence and darkness, and now a rustling, a Lily Ross took the yellow parchment in her hand and stepped toward the light of the blue brazier.

She stood there, poised and statuesque, a blond handmaiden of Evil. Her oval face was dedicated to darkness as her red lips shaped the first syllables that broke the utter silence.

Keith's face was pudgy and prosaic in the glare, but his eyes shone with the fanatic zeal of a Puritan warlock.

Sweat beaded my forehead.

*"Would you go to hell for ten thousand dollars?"*

Here, in this skyscraper tower, I was nearer to hell than I would be in the bowels of the earth.

Here stood the magic circle, the witch, the wizard. Here was the source, the linkage between Man and Mystery.

Lily Ross spoke the first sentences of the incantation.

I thought that her mouth was a scarlet flower, emanating corruption. I thought that her lips were heaven, but her voice was hell. I saw a beautiful young girl, and I heard the withered croaking of a crone.

It can't be explained. There was nothing wrong with her *tone*. It was what she *said*.

The words were Latin, but they didn't seem to be words as much as sounds, and not so much sounds as *vibrations*.

Not college Latin. Not words with meaning in themselves. Not words spoken as sentences. Just sounds, constructed for a purpose. An evil purpose.

I knew that. I knew it as strongly as I knew my own existence.

Lily Ross was reciting an incantation, and for the first time I realized what an incantation meant.

It was a call to a demon.

It was the use of human tongue in a peculiar way, to set up certain vibrations, certain forces that touched, or impinged upon, other worlds. Sound-waves, reaching across planes and angles of existence, commanding and guiding. Sound-waves shatter glasses in modern laboratories. Sound-waves shatter buildings, if properly pitched in volume and intensity. And sound-waves, over and above radio frequency vibrations, can pluck the harps that sound in hell. Can knock upon the gates of the Pit and call forth Presences.

Her voice was but an instrument. The meaningless drone was rising, almost uncontrollably.

Now I knew what truth there was in the power of the word. The word used in prayer, and the word used in black summons.

The drone blended with the blackness. The blackness mingled oddly with the green, the violet, the blue fires.

The Pentagram became a wriggling, phosphorescent serpent, swaying amidst green, purple, and blue words of flame. The shadows droned. The girl burned and flickered.

Suddenly the pulsing began.

It shook the walls. It rose with the words the girl recited, blended with them, then emerged stronger, triumphant. Smoke spiralled up in a sudden jet from the braziers, as a great wind filled the chamber.

I shook before the icy blast that was not air—shook as though a dental drill buzzed through my nerves.

I looked through water at a shimmering, slim figure, a slithering silver line on the floor, a wiggling spiral of colored fires. And then the light came up, the roar came up, the voice came up to a single, sustained note.

"Wake up!"

"Somebody was shaking me. It was Keith. Slowly the roaring died away.

"You're out on your feet, man!"

I looked around. There was no shimmering. No wind. No noise. Lily Ross—a girl, not a witch—stood silent and dejected.

Keith scowled at me. "We've failed."

"But I felt something—something—"

"Pure self-hypnosis. It didn't work."

Lily Ross stepped over.

"Let me see this copy of the incantation," Keith demanded, wearily. He took the paper from her hand.

"Damnation!"

Lily's eyes widened to a deeper blue. "What's the matter?"

"Matter? Here's a perfect example of what I was trying to explain. You've made a mistake here. This isn't the proper invocation at all. This isn't the Richalmus

ritual. It's that other one almost like it—Gorgioso's Invocation of the Devil!"

"How did that happen?" asked the girl. "I could have sworn—"

"I'll do the swearing," snapped Keith. "You've recited the Invocation of the Devil by mistake. No wonder nothing happened!"

He turned to me, but didn't say anything. There was no chance to speak.

For the roaring started again, and this time there was no question of self-hypnosis involved.

The rumbling shook the room as though the building was clawed by an earthquake. Lily and Professor Keith stood swaying beside me as the wind rose, the flame flared, the thunderous crescendo swept through our bodies, tore at our brains.

Gleaming with lambent fire, the Pentagram writhed at our feet. Within it a black shadow—a black shadow, coalescing, blurring into an outline—an outline in the Pentagram of Satan, Black Goat of the Sabbath!

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Lily Ross's trembling hands move out, saw the crumpled scrap of paper fall from her fingers. It was the parchment from which she had read the incantation—the *wrong* incantation. The one that summoned up the Devil.

And now—a figure stood in the Pentagram!

### *3. Speaks of the Devil*

WE STARED, all of us. Lily Ross gave a tiny gasp, lost amidst the crackling of the braziers. Keith was numb. I found myself trembling, unable to lift my hands and shield my eyes from a vision that seared and burned with a flame from the Pit.

The Presence crouched there in the Pentagram, its black goat-face gleaming in the glare of the fires. The shaggy, tousled head with the stumps of goat-horns, the fiendishly familiar visage, the cloaked body—I saw them all, merging into a sharper focus of actuality.

The Presence *gathered* itself as I gazed, as though revelling in the actuality of its new physical existence. Like a child being born and *realizing* it.

But this was no child. There was nothing youthful in the ancient smirk of relish on that ageless face. The fires in those slitted eyes burned long before the gases which created Earth.

It was a tableau born in a daemonic dream. And like a dream, it dissolved into sudden, terrible action.

The goat-body moved, black arms extended. Claws, talons, call them what you will, emerged swiftly from the cloak. They reached across the Pentagram.

One foot moved out. Black, misshapen. Hooflike. *Cloven!*

My own feet moved then. Moved in desperate swiftness. As the Presence lumbered forward I raced for the doorway. My outstretched arms tugged frantically at the lever Keith had shown me. I wrenched it down.

From the ceiling the iron chains grated. There was a thunderous crash, and then the great glass cage dropped down squarely over the black body of Satan, Prince of Darkness.

The creature in the cage beat black claws against the glass and suddenly recoiled.

"Good Lord!" These, the first words spoken, were Keith's contribution. They sounded most appropriate.

I began to laugh. I couldn't help it.

"What's that for?" Lily Ross whispered.

"I was just thinking," I gasped weakly. "I've—I've matched wits against Satan himself, the Arch-Enemy. And won!"

Lily calmly reached out with one slim hand and slapped my face. Hard.

I sobered. "Thanks," I whispered. "I couldn't control it."

"No hysteria," she said. "If you'd kept that up one minute more, I'd have started to scream myself. It's too much—we've got Satan locked up in a skyscraper!"

"Are you still skeptical?" Keith asked.

"Skeptics don't sweat," I answered, dabbing my forehead. "But if I'm not skeptical, I'm practical. What do we do now?"

"Turn on the lights, for one thing." Keith pressed the rheostat. The room blazed up into prosaic outline. Fluorescence turned the darkness to daylight, and we stood in the draped chamber—ordinary figures once more, in an ordinary room.

Except for that glass cage, and the horror it held.

It was bad enough in the firelight, but now the nightmare quality of our captive was accentuated ten-fold.

The black figure stood proudly in the center of the glass enclosure—stood proud as Lucifer. Unbidden, the three of us drew closer.

Under the lights I saw every detail. Too much detail. The monster was shaggy, a goat-headed Aegypan figure with human eyes and mouth. The skin was jet-black, but dull. I stared intently at one gnarled talon—horrified at its microscopic detail and the total absence of visible pores in the skin.

Lily's blue eyes, Keith's gray ones, followed mine.

"It's incredible," muttered the pudgy professor. "Just like the mental image I'd formed. "The beard, the mustache, the monocle. And the red skin."

"*Red* skin?" I snapped. "It's black!"

"Scaly!" insisted Lily.

"No scales," I said. "What are you talking about? And what do you mean, monocle? Why, he's like a black goat."

"Are you crazy?" Keith said. "Why anyone can see that he's a man in evening dress with a red face and a monocle."

"What about that forked tail?" asked Lily. "That's the worst."

"No tail at all," I retorted. "You two aren't seeing straight."

Keith stepped back.

"Wait a minute," he protested. "Let's consider this." He cocked his head my way. "You claim you see a sort of black goat, with human features, wearing a cloak?"

I NODDED.

"And you, Lily?"

"A scaly creature with a forked tail. More like a gray lizard."

"And I see a red fiend in evening dress," Keith announced. "Well, we're all correct."

"I don't get it."

"Don't you understand? No one really knows what the Devil looks like. Each of us has his own mental picture, drawn from imaginative illustrations in books. Throughout known history, Satan has been pictured in several ways by his worshipers and enemies. To some he appeared as the Goat of the Sabbath, the primitive fiend of the oriental nomads, the Father of Lies known to the Bible.

"To others he is essentially the incarnation of the Tempter, the Serpent. To moderns, he is the red gentleman. We three each visualize him in our own way, and the focal thought of millions throughout the ages materializes him in whichever aspect seems most natural to the beholder.

"We're all looking at the same figure. We all see different concepts. What he really looks like, we cannot say. He may be gas, or light, or simply a flame. But our thoughts give him the material body."

"You may be right," Lily hazarded.

"Why not? I don't want to blaspheme, but does anyone know what Christ really looked like? No—all we have to go by is the standard concept, which was invented by medieval painters. And yet, He is always pictured in one way, and we have come to think of Him in that way. We

couldn't see Him in any other form. So it is with the Enemy."

"That's all very interesting," I interrupted. "But what do we do now—phone for the papers?"

"Are you joking? Do you know what would happen if the world learned that we had—him captive in this room? Can't you see the panic, the madness that would be loosed on earth?

"Besides, we must experiment. Yes, this is our opportunity. Povidence must have guided us when we made that mistake!"

"Are you sure it was Providence?" asked Lily, quietly. "This gift did not come from Heaven."

"Don't quibble. My girl, just realize what we have here in our midst! Why, it's the greatest thing that's happened since—"

"The capture of Gargantua, the gorilla," I finished for him. But I didn't smile when I said it. "Keith, this is dangerous. I don't like it. We've apparently got our visitor bottled up under glass, but if he ever gets loose—"

"He won't get loose," Keith barked. "Are you a coward, man? Can't you see that here, in this very room, we hold a proof of witchcraft, a proof of the existence of the supernatural, of evil?"

"I agree with you about evil," I answered. "And I'm afraid. He who sups with the devil must have a long spoon."

"You talk like—"

"A priest," I finished again. "And perhaps they are wiser than you scientists think. They have been fighting this creature here for long centuries, and their wisdom should be heeded."

"Why, you said yourself that you matched wits with the Devil and beat him," Keith protested. "We, with the weapons of scientific research at our command, are going to study our guest. Why, we'll give him a blood test, we'll examine the skin, we'll isolate cells under the microscope, we'll use X-ray, we'll—"

I turned away. It was madness. I sought sanity in Lily Ross's blue eyes. But she was babbling too. The scientific spirit.

"Maybe the creature can speak. What about an intelligence test? We'll get our dope from the staff. Take pictures."

"You'd think it was some new sort of guinea-pig. But I didn't. Not when I saw the black body crouching there, huddled up away from the cross-etched glass, but with flaming evil in its eyes. They had the Devil in a cage, and they wanted his fingerprints!

"Success!" Keith trumpeted. "Success beyond the wildest dreams of man. We'll conduct a scientific study of all evil—of incarnate evil. The nature and principle of evil. The evil men have known of, feared throughout the ages since Creation. It's there. We all see it differently through our own eyes. All men do, but it exists. Like electricity. A force."

He stood beside the glass enclosure, gesturing like a circus barker.

"Behold the Great God Pan! Yes, and behold the Serpent, the Tempter, the Fallen Angel! Behold Satan, Lucifer, Beelzebub, Azriel, Asmodeus, Sammael, Zamiel, Prince of Darkness and Father of Lies! Gaze on the Black Goat of the Sabbath, gaze on fabled Ahriman, on Set, Typhon, Malik Tawis, Abaddon, Yama, Primal Nodens, the archetype of evil, known to all men by all names!"

Once again I felt the urge of hysterical laughter. This was too much. Only the girl saved me.

"Let's get out of here," she suggested. "At once. We've had a shock. Tomorrow we can sit down and reason this thing out clearly, if we're not crazy already. We can make plans sensibly then. Let's rest."

"You're right. I'm sure that—he—

will be safe behind the glass. And this room is locked, sealed. No one must suspect."

Keith moved toward the door and we followed. He snapped out the light as the door opened, plunged the room into Stygian night.

We went out. I looked back once. There was nothing but blackness, and two red coals burning. Eyes. Eyes in the darkness. The eyes of Satan. The eyes that saw Faust.

### *4. Hell Breaks Loose*

"SO THAT'S my story," I concluded. "Now, what's yours?"

Lily Ross raised her glass, tinkling the ice in rhythm to the music from the orchestra.

"Just a little astro-physics and bio-chemistry," she smiled. "A job at Rocklynn as Keith's assistant."

"Don't kid me. You're a blonde in a green evening dress, the prettiest come-on girl in this supper club. And you're going to dance with me, because you never heard of chemistry or physics, but you can La Conga all night."

She could, too. One whirl around the floor convinced me. Clinched me, in fact. That noise like a ton of bricks was me falling. But I didn't care. I had the Devil by the tail and Lily Ross in my arms, and I was sitting on top of the world tonight.

But when we got back to our table, Lily sobered for a moment.

"I say," she said. "I'm worried about Professor Keith. That excitement today, our experiment, unnerved him. Hope he's going to be all right tomorrow. He went home in a taxi and went to bed."

"Calm yourself, Lily," I said. "If he isn't all right tomorrow, he'll merely be suffering from a hangover."

"What do you mean?"

"Take a squint at that table near the orchestra," I grinned. "If Keith got in a taxi he wasn't going home."

Lily took her squint, and then her eyes went wide. "Why, he's here—and he's with a woman!"

"That's putting it mildly," I told her. "He's got a woman and a half there. It's Eve Vernon, the singer in *On the Beam*. Never thought he was such a man-about-town."

"He isn't!" Lily gasped. "Why, he never goes anywhere at all. I've never heard of him escorting a woman. And that's champagne on his table, too. Why—"

"Live and learn," I said. "He's just relaxing, that's all. Shall we join him?"

"Certainly not. It might embarrass him. Besides, there's something strange about this—"

I shrugged, but subsequent events bore me out. Keith was relaxing to a point where it was necessary to bear him out. He danced. He drank two quarts of champagne, solo. He laughed. He reddened. He tried to dance with the girls in the floor show. When Lily and I slipped out he was singing drunkenly at the top of his lungs, to the delight of the surrounding tables.

"Disgusting," Lily commented.

"Forget it," I advised.

I forgot it in her good-night kiss. I forgot everything. All I knew was that tomorrow, at ten o'clock, she would be waiting down at Rocklynn.

She was. I entered the outer lobby and took her arm.

"Where's the Professor?" I asked.

"He didn't show up."

"He *must* have a hangover, then! Did you call him?"

"Certainly. His housekeeper says he hasn't been in all night."

"Strange. What shall we do?"

"Let's go into the laboratory and wait. We must inspect our—specimen."

Lily led the way down the hall, to the barred doorway. She fumbled with a key.

"Why—it's open!"

We entered.

The room was dark, and only a single brazier burned. A single brazier, and the red eyes in the glass cage.

A figure huddled before the cage.

"Keith!"

I shook him. He struggled to his feet.

"Oh—I must have dozed off. Been here almost all night. Watching to see what he would do—"

Keith's face was haggard, his clothing rumpled. He spoke thickly, as though half-asleep.

"Better get home and get some rest," Lily suggested. "We'll stay here. If you feel up to it this afternoon, we can make our plans then."

SUDDENLY the Professor drew himself up. He seemed to visibly shake off his fatigue.

"Nonsense! I'm all right. Feel splendid, perfectly splendid. But no time for a conference, my dear. I've got to find Considine. Need more money from him, at once.

"Got a great idea, a great idea. Tell you all about it. Must find Considine, though. You stay here, keep your eyes open. See you tonight at the Test Tube Ball. I'll arrange to meet Considine there, and some of his friends."

He was gone. Lily's mouth was a red oval of astonishment.

"Test Tube Ball?" I repeated.

"Yes. Society masquerade. Patrons of Rocklynn Institute hold it every year. Collect funds there, you know. But what does Keith want at such a gathering? He never dances or goes in for social affairs."

"You forget last night."

"That's just the point—I can't forget last night. That Professor isn't well, I'm sure of it. Something has happened."

"He isn't the only one who isn't well," I said softly. "Look into the glass."

Lily turned and we surveyed the cage together.

Satan squatted, half-slumping, on the floor. The red eyes flickered, but they were suddenly fainter in their fire.

"Sick?" Lily murmured.

"No air—or no food. What does His Majesty eat?" I began. But something about the aspect of the creature cut me short.

"I wish Keith were here," said Lily. "We ought to do something."

We peered into the glass.

Suddenly Satan opened his eyes. He sat up and stared back. All at once he rose to his feet, stepped forward. His upraised claws almost touched the glass, but not quite. The gesture was one of appeal. And in those eyes I read not hate, but—recognition!

Lips curled, disclosing yellowed fangs. They moved silently behind the glass.

"He's trying to talk to us!" Lily gasped. "I'm sure of it!"

"Watch!"

The black fiend was gesturing wildly. Its eyes rested first on Lily's face and then my own.

"If we could only find out—"

"No use."

Evidently it was true. His Unholiness suddenly slumped to rest once again on the floor, head buried in the long black arms.

We stared at one another for a long moment.

Once more there was activity within the cage. The creature had bent down on its knees over the floor. One claw held a tiny sliver. With a start, I recognized it. It was chalk—the phosphorescent stuff used to draw the Pentagram with. And the Devil was writing!

From time to time eyes rested on our faces in a strange appeal. The bony fingers

continued to move: slowly, painfully.

Letters traced upon the floor. Words. Sentences. And then it was done.

"Turn out the flame of the brazier," Lily whispered. "Then we can read it."

I clicked it off, plunged the room into utter darkness. I advanced through that darkness to her side, stared into the dim glow on the floor. A glow that brightened.

Letters. Letters of fire. Silver fire on the floor. I read the words.

"Quickly! Stop him before it's too late. He got into me this morning and I know what he means to do."

That's when I gasped.

I gasped again at the sight of the two words beneath the message. They were a signature.

*"Phillips Keith,"* I read. Letters of silver fire in my brain.

Lily was shaking at my side. I pulled her to her feet.

"Come on," I said.

"Where?"

"After the Professor, of course. We're going to the Test Tube Ball."

### *5. The Devil Dances*

THE Lone Ranger never had a mission like mine. Nor a costume like mine, either. Lily's hunting outfit was more appropriate. We were out to get our man—if man he was.

There was no dancing in mind for us tonight. Not if what we suspected were true. It might have been cunning on the thing's part—the cunning of a fiend. But anything was possible in a world gone mad. We had the Devil in a cage. Who in this room would believe that? Yet it was true. And these dancing, babbling digits of the Four Hundred hadn't the faintest suspicion.

I smiled grimly at the thought. Suppose His Hellishness should walk suddenly into this very ballroom?

I imagined the screaming, the dismay, the horror. They'd dance to a different tune if *that* happened!

But—*it did.*

Lily and I stood by the door waiting. We'd been there for ten minutes, ever since our arrival, eyes scanning the dancers for a glimpse of Keith. He was on his way, the housekeeper had said, when our frantic call had come through. He should be here now, any minute. So we stood there, and Satan walked in.

It was Keith, of course, in a Mephistocles disguise. Red suit, false beard and mustache. But he'd added a grisly touch. Red chalk on face and hands. *His* concept of Satan.

I HAD never realized he was so tall. Tall and slender. He looked the part, looked it too well.

We weren't the only ones to notice it. The orchestra had just finished a number, and the crowded hall was a perfect setting for his entrance. He came down three stairs, and all at once the conversation seemed to die away. Women stopped talking in mid-screech, and the fat paws of business men tightened about their cigars in astonishment as Phillips Keith walked into the room.

My mind shuttled back in memory to a similar scene. Red Death! That was it—Lon Chaney as Red Death in *The Phantom of the Opera!* It terrified me as a child, and now my spine tingled anew. Phillips Keith as Satan, Master of Evil.

"What a disguise!"

"Perfect!"

"Even the club foot!"

I could have choked the thin matron who said that. She would have to call *that* to my attention. The tingling in my spine became a pulsation of dread.

For Phillips Keith limped.

"Dropped something on his foot," Lily whispered. "He must have—"

Club foot. Or cloven hoof?

The red figure of Mephistocles stalked through the parted lane. Proudly he walked, despite the limp. Proud as Lucifer.

I saw him beckon to a stout man in pirate costume.

"Considine," said Lily, dully. "That's Thomas Considine."

Keith said a few words. Considine appeared to be laughing, commenting on the disguise. He walked at the Professor's side, then beckoned to a companion. The party moved toward a side door.

At that moment the orchestra struck up. Dancing started once more, conversation rose suddenly, and the red-clad Mephisto and his two companions disappeared from the floor.

I grabbed Lily's wrist and jostled through the crowd.

"Hurry," I commanded. "Something's up!"

WE REACHED the door just as the red cloak whisked into the elevator. The door closed, the car moved down.

"Stairs!"

Three flights down in nothing, flat. The red cloak flicked tantalizingly out of the lobby.

We reached the street just as the black car rolled away.

Heaven sent a taxi around the corner.

I pushed Lily inside, to nurse her black and blue wrist.

"Follow that car—" I began. Then, "To blazes with that! Just take us to Rockiynn Foundation. I know where they're going."

Lily knew, too. We didn't say anything, just stared at each other, and I'm afraid my eyes were as frightened as hers.

Hurtling down the black, gaping mouths of midnight streets, riding the wind behind the red cloak of Satan—this wasn't New York, but ancient Prague.

Then, climbing the dark tower of the skyscraper, up toward the hidden chamber—this wasn't the twentieth century, but a scene set in medieval nightmare.

As we paused before the door marked *Private,* we heard a voice. It too was filtered through a black dream. Keith's voice—partly.

I don't like to admit that it was only *partly* Keith's voice, but what else can one say? It was a voice coming from his throat, using his larynx, but there was a deep, burring overtone that was altogether unnatural in any human throat.

It might have been imagination. As we stood before that door, I hoped it was imagination.

Maybe Keith had a cold. That's why he sounded that way. But cold or no cold, I couldn't help hearing what he *said.* That was by far the worst of all.

Whispering huskily from that black room—

"So now you see what I have accomplished, gentlemen. You, Considine, and you, Mr. Wintergreen, can no longer doubt the evidence of your own senses."

"But it's monstrous!" Considine boomed. "The Devil in a cage!"

"Monstrous, you say? Glorious! Don't you see the possibilities here?"

"I suppose it's all very interesting scientifically, but what do you intend to do—exhibit this creature to the public or something of the sort?"

Keith laughed. Or rather, that voice laughed.

"Considine, you talk like a fool. Can't you realize we have something here that can become the most powerful force on earth?"

"Powerful?" interrupted the nasal tones of Wintergreen.

"Yes, all-powerful. Consider, gentlemen, for a moment, what our captive can

mean to us. Have you ever heard of the Black Mass, of the worship of Satan?

"For centuries men have gathered to pay homage to the Devil. Believing that the Kingdom of Heaven is ruled by God, they claim that earth is ruled by Satan, and choose to worship him. If he grants them happiness here on earth, they are willing to forsake celestial joys."

"What utter rot!"

THE voice droned on, contemptuous of the interruption. "They meet in hidden places—the cellars of ancient houses or ruined churches—on Walpurgis Eve and other unhallowed nights. Candles, fashioned from the corpse-fat of unbaptized infants, light their devotions to the Prince of Darkness. An unfrocked priest presides over the altar; the altar which is the naked, living flesh of a woman. All boast of their sins, and confess penitently their good deeds.

"Then, as the Lord's Prayer is recited in reverse, a parody of the Mass is held. The Mass of St. Secaire, the unholy ritual of Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade. A sacrifice is given to Satan, and celebrants drink of a red wine which is truly human blood. All do homage to the Father of Evil, who grants them then their dark desires."

"Don't talk like that," Wintergreen begged, in nervous protest. "We're not children, to be frightened by bogey-men."

"Neither are the thousands of secret Satanists who carry on these rites. They believe. Many of them are the victims of charlatans, frauds who prey on the neurotic rich.

"And I'm not offering you a bogey-man. I'm offering you the actual physical entity of the Fallen Angel, the Master of the Great Black Lodge.

"That's why I brought you here and showed you our captive. Your money enabled me to summon him. It is only fitting now that you be given the opportunity to profit thereby."

The droning voice held cunning. Devilish cunning. Lily grasped my wrist, but I shrugged her into silence again as we crouched, listening.

"We have here the opportunity for power. For undreamt of wealth. We, and we alone, are the masters of Satan. Let me tell you my plan.

"I shall become the High Priest of the Satanists. You, Considine, and you, Wintergreen, shall go out among your friends and proselyte. Bring the rich old women, the eccentric old men into the fold. Bring them to the Black Mass, spread the word that a new day is at hand for those who would pay the price to the Powers of Darkness. Tell them that there are ways to obtain eternal youth, ways to obtain more wealth, ways to wreak revenge.

"Can't you see? We'll build an empire out of what was once only an old wive's tale! We can control nations, master the earth!"

"Have you gone crazy, Keith?" Considine's deep voice trembled. "Are you utterly mad? First you show up in a Mephisto costume, then you bring us to look at this freak, this animal hybrid of yours, and now you babble insanities."

"Yes," Wintergreen amended, weakly. "I'm getting out of here."

"No you don't. You know the secret, and it's too much. Neither of you leaves this room until you've agreed."

I don't know what I intended to do. I only realized that there would never be a better cue for my entrance.

I flung the door open and marched in, Lily Ross at my side.

Considine and Wintergreen stared with open mouths. In the glass cage beyond, the black figure gestured frantically in the red glow of the braziers.

I ignored them all. I had eyes only for Keith—for the man in the red cloak, the

man with the red face and the spade beard.

As he turned to face me, I read his eyes, read the blazing message there. His hands swooped up, claw-like, as I charged.

Sheer instinct drove me on; the same instinct that guides a man to crush a wriggling serpent, even though he knows it is about to strike.

Lily screamed as my hands closed about Keith's scarlet throat, rose to rake his face. I almost screamed as I felt that face.

I was tearing at his disguise, at his false beard. Tearing and tearing — and it wouldn't come off.

For Professor Phillips Keith was *not* disguised at all. He was Satan in red flesh!

The dragging club-foot, the cloven hoof moved up, butting my thighs. The claws razored my chest. The deep growling from the creature's throat welled horribly. I punched out at the fiendish visage, and my hands hammered against iron.

Considine and Wintergreen, Lily and the creature in the cage whirled crazily by. Red arms encircled me, and began to crush.

To crush and break. Pudgy little arms bent me back until I felt my spine bending like a white-hot wire of pain. Pudgy little arms—but they held strength. *The strength of a demon.*

Demon arms crushing. Demon breath searing my face. Demon face glaring into my own. My senses ebbed, and a chuckling rose from the grinning thing that crushed me like a rag-doll, crushed me down into darkness and a swirling mist of pain.

I tore my left hand free, somehow; got it up to my pocket. I wrenched the flask out, ripped the cork with frantic fingers. The creature grabbed for my arm, twisted it, but the flask was open. I jerked it up.

A white stream spurted against the red face. With a howl of agony, the thing's arms flew up to shield its head. Breaking free, I spattered more of the fluid on the head and shoulders. Rocking on its feet a moment, the creature staggered, fell to its knees. A hideous stench arose. Smoke seemed to pour from the redskin.

As the thing fell, I was upon it. I tore the hands from the ravaged face, for there was no strength in those red talons now. I jammed the flask up against the pain-contorted mouth, tilted it. The liquid gushed forth, gurgled down the crimson maw.

In a moment it was over. I rose and faced the three at my side. Lily sobbed.

"I—I thought it would kill you," she gasped. "Until you threw the acid in its face."

"Acid?" I echoed. "Acid, hell—*that was holy water!*"

### *6. Getting Behind Satan*

"YES, the holy water did the trick." It was Professor Phillips Keith who spoke—spoke weakly, through ashen lips —but spoke, and in a voice unmistakably his own. Considine and Wintergreen knelt at his side, propping up his gray head.

It had taken ten minutes to bring him around. At first we had thought the red thing dead—and it was Lily who noticed the *change,* and pointed it out with a murmur of astonishment.

The redness of the skin faded out, slowly. The contours of the body altered subtly, almost before our eyes. It was like the Jekyll-Hyde transformation accomplished by a movie camera, but the reality was ghastly.

When we saw Professor Phillips Keith lying on the floor in an incongruous red cloak, when we saw his eyelids flutter weakly, some measure of composure returned. By the time the familiar, "What happened?" came faintly from his lips, we were prepared to answer. I told him the story.

"Yes, it was the holy water, all right,"

he repeated. "Pure inspiration on your part to think of it."

"Pure desperation," I corrected.

"I must have been pretty bad."

"You were—evil," Lily interjected slowly. "Utterly evil."

"But what does it all mean?" Considine asked.

"It means that I was possessed of the devil."

"Do you really believe—"

"You saw me," Keith continued. "It was a clear case of what the ancients called *demoniac possession*. From Bible times down, literature and history is filled with recorded instances of men and women who were 'possessed.' Such a condition overtook me.

"I don't know how it started. When we evoked that thing in the cage, I suppose. The shock of our success weakened my mental resistance. The barriers went down in a wave of enthusiasm. You remember my harangue before the glass, don't you?" Keith turned to me.

I nodded.

"That night I came back. I wanted another look at our captive. I got it—guess I got too much. The creature hypnotized me. I didn't know. I looked at it and I became *elated*. I felt exhilarated, half-intoxicated. What religious maniacs describe, and what the old priests of Pan used to call—*ecstasy*.

"That was it. You and Lily saw the effect it had on me. I went out that night, can't even remember how. Another will than my own seemed to command me, drive me. Working through my senses, the creature broke down my volition. Satan knows the flesh.

"After that night I came back. I came back at dawn, under a compulsion born of intoxication and the inner urge upon me. I came back to stare at the creature in the cage, stare at the red eyes in the darkness which glistened like two distant whirling worlds of evil. Two distant worlds that came closer, merged and blended with our own world, blended with my own brain. You and Lily found me asleep beside the cage this morning. The change had occurred.

"I don't remember much of today. It must have worked very fast. I have only two distinct memories—one, of looking into a mirror late this afternoon and seeing my skin assume a reddish tint, as though I had been deeply sunburned. The other memory is vaguer still. It concerns writing something with a piece of chalk in a dream."

I told Keith about our experience with the strangely cowed creature in the cage.

"Part of me must have entered into it when it took my body," he said gravely. His face clouded again in recollection. "My body! By nightfall it wasn't my body any more. The leg dragged. I seemed to know what was happening, but I didn't care. I had this ecstasy, this force, driving me. I went to the ball, and you know the rest."

There was silence. Somehow Considine's muttered "Incredible!" sounded mawkish and inappropriate.

"Professor, you should get some rest," said Lily. "The shock—I think it would be best if you spent a few days in the hospital until—"

A white hand waved.

"I can't, my dear. I can't. Don't you see? We have *him* to deal with."

The hand leveled toward the glass cage. Our eyes followed.

THE slumping figure behind the glass was gone. In its place once more was Satan, Lord of the Sabbath. Black, erect, and menacing, with the yellow, rotted fangs sneering in malignant fury. There was no mistaking the hate, the thwarted desire in those burning eyes. Considine and Wintergreen saw it for the first time. They

breathed through their mouths hoarsely.

Yes, Satan was back. Satan waited again, waited to spring.

"We thought we had him trapped, but you see—we haven't," Keith whispered. "He has found the way to get out. He can take possession of the human body and walk the earth as a man. For a day or so, anyway. Then the human body changes and the man becomes outwardly, as well as inwardly, the image of Evil. We must get rid of him once and for all. We must!"

"Take it easy," I said. "We understand."

"But you don't understand, you can't. Not until you've been through what I've been through. God!" Keith shuddered. "I'll never rest until we've found a way to send him back to Hell."

"You'll rest. Lily and I will get to work, I promise you." The girl nodded agreement.

"Send him back," Keith whispered. "You can't kill him, there is no way. Send him back before—"

The gray head slumped.

"He's passed out," Wintergreen said.

"Good! Phone for an ambulance. We'll carry him out to the lobby. Say it's collapse from overwork or something. Our word is good. He needs hospital attention."

We carried Keith out, carried the plan out.

Lily and I faced the two industrialists.

"Not a word of this now, to anyone," I cautioned. "We alone share the secret, and we alone must solve it. Keith was right. We must find a way to send this creature back."

"I still can't believe it," Wintergreen said. Considine scowled in perplexity.

"Neither do I, but I can feel it, all right. I don't pretend to understand all you've told me, but I know that you're right. It's a mistake to pry into these things. Send that thing back to wherever it came from, use any method you want, and charge the bill to me."

"You'll keep silence?" I reiterated.

"We will." Considine walked heavily toward the door. Suddenly the big man turned. His beefy face worked with unwonted emotion. "And may God help you in the task," he said softly.

The two went out. I faced Lily.

"There's a job to do," I said grimly. "Are you game?"

"You know I am."

"After what happened to Keith, I'm almost afraid to let you help," I murmured.

"You'll have to. I'm the only one who knows the formulae."

"We'll be playing with fire," I persisted.

"Hell fire," added the girl. "But we won't be burned."

### 7. *Devil May Care*

"ANY luck?" I asked dully.

"No," sighed the girl. She rose from the desk, one slim hand brushing back the golden cascade of her hair. "I'm afraid it's no use. There are no formulae here to get rid of him."

"But there has to be one," I insisted. "There must be a way to send him back."

"Not by incantation." Her hopeless glance met mine, melted. For a moment we stood together—then turned, by common impulse, to the glass cage in the center of the room.

Black, brooding, baleful, the Goat of the Sabbath crouched on the floor. The leering, beady eyes rested scornfully on our own. Yellowed fangs menaced in a derisive grin.

Lily shivered. "Can he hear us?" she asked.

"It doesn't matter. He knows. He's waiting, too."

"That's what I'm afraid of. Darling, we can't go on like this forever. It's been two days already. We can't keep on hid-

ing it always—and if anyone should suspect—"

"There must be a way out!" I scowled, my eyes restlessly searching the room.

"Wait a minute. I've got it!"

"What?"

"Didn't Professor Keith say something about tubing in the glass cage? Something about lethal gas?"

"You're right!" Lily's smile became animated. "That tank over there under the table—it's got the tubing attached. We just plug into the panel at the side, and the gas is released. Hand-pump. Come on, I'll show you."

We did the job. It wasn't easy to brave the ghoulish stare of the creature in the cage as my hands fumbled with the nozzle of the hose and screwed it into place.

It was easier to feel the reassuring firmness of the efficient hand-pump handle, once things were in readiness.

"I hope it works," Lily whispered.

"It must work. We have to kill this thing somehow," I answered. "Here goes."

I pumped.

There was a hissing, the inflated tube writhed like a serpent. I watched the nozzle in the panel.

A cloudy vapor poured into the glass enclosure.

I pumped harder, as the black figure vanished suddenly in a whirl of poisonous fog.

"It's working!" exclaimed the girl. "Keep it up—nothing can survive this stuff."

Billows of whitish smoke writhed in miniature Inferno behind the glass. Inferno for a demon.

The pump sighed emptily.

Together we advanced toward the clouded glass pane.

"See anything?" I asked.

"No. Not yet." Lily pressed her forehead against the glass of the cage, wrinkled it in straining scrutiny. "No—wait a minute. The smoke is clearing."

"Clearing? There's nowhere for it to go!"

"But it is!"

And it was. Even as we watched, the white vapor thinned into spirals, shreds, cumulae.

Behind it crouched the black, goatish body.

Crouched, not slumped.

Satan was alive! And yet the gases cleared—*because he was inhaling them!*

"Good Lord, he's absorbing the stuff into his system! He *breathes* poison!" I murmured.

Malignant, triumphant, the black goat pranced. Its eyes shone with evil merriment, with a sort of added animation.

"He thrives on the stuff," Lily sighed. "Now what?"

"Water," I said.

The details don't matter. We used the same tubing, and a new pump. Filled the glass enclosure to the brim. Enough water to drown anything inside.

He absorbed it, of course.

I was afraid to try an arc-welder.

"You can't kill the Devil with fire," Lily told me.

That was that. Bombs were out—anything was out which entailed the risk of releasing His Satanic Majesty.

We were back to where we started.

"Give me another day," Lily said. "I'll find an incantation. There must be something here. Some variant on a spell for casting out demons, perhaps. Just put a twist on it. We must get one."

"I must get some sleep," I added. And meant it. Devil-killing is hard work.

"Go home," commanded the girl.

"And leave you here alone with that? Not on your life! Remember what happened to Keith."

"Well, go into the private office down the hall and take a nap. There's a couch there. I'll keep on working."

"I don't know," I said, slowly.

"I'll be all right. I won't even look at our friend here. Besides, you know what Keith said. He was almost out on his feet, his mental barriers were down. I'm no pushover. Go ahead now, run along and get your rest. I'll promise to get out of here in an hour or so."

"Promise me that?"

"Of course, darling."

"And you won't look at him?"

"Not when I can look at you." She stood very close. I put my arms around her, held her. Over my shoulder the fiend grinned. But her smile warmed.

"All right. But I'm coming back within an hour. And if I catch you flirting with Old Nick here, you'll be sorry."

Abruptly I sobered. "You really think there's a chance of finding a way?"

"I do. We *must*. Now, off with you."

I left the room. Lily Ross sat down, ran her hands through her golden hair, and opened the black book on the desk. In the dancing light of the braziers she looked as she had when I first saw her—like a white witch.

She *was* a white witch in my dreams.

### 8. *Hell Hath No Fury—*

SHE was only a girl when she awakened me.

I grinned sheepishly through a shroud of sleep. "Sorry. Guess I broke my promise and overslept. Didn't know I was so tired."

"You were tired, darling. Know how long you've been sleeping?"

"No."

"Three hours."

"Really?"

"Uh huh. Feel better now?"

"Certainly. I'm ready for anything. What about you?"

"Still bright." She looked it, too. Her eyes sparkled with gaiety.

"You look as though you had some luck. Find anything?" I asked.

"Well—yes and no. There's a chant in the Prinn *Saracenic Rituals* relating to djin and efreet that could be used, I think. But the German translation is bad. I'm going to check it against the Latin."

"Now?"

"No, silly. Tomorrow. Now I'm going to relax. And you're going to relax with me. Let's go out and take in the town tonight; forget all about this crazy business."

"But what about—"

"Quit scowling, dear. It's all right. We need a vacation. The strain is too much, sometimes, when you think about what we're doing, what's in that room."

"Don't you think you'd be better off if you went home and rested, Lily?"

"No." Her eyes met mine. "It's dark, and I don't like the dark. It makes me think too much. It makes me dream about —*him*. Don't you see? I want light, people, something to make me forget."

She was shaking underneath her smile. Hysteria, nearly.

"All right. Did you—lock up?"

"Certainly. Stop fretting. The room is barred."

I rose to my feet.

"We'd better stop in at the hospital and see how Professor Keith is resting," I suggested.

"Please—not now. I'm all on edge. I just want to forget everything connected with this, for tonight. Let's not think about anything except us."

The suggestion was pleasant. Alluring. Alluring, as Lily was. She did sparkle. Her golden hair, the scarlet of her lips, the turquoise of her eyes—all seemed accentuated by inner fire. She slipped one arm in mine, possessively. I felt a tingling as her bare flesh met my wrist. We swept into the outer lobby of Rocklynn. I almost laughed.

Here was a crowd of bustling, officious

clerks and directors. White-coated chemists stepped briskly in and out of the long series of offices along the further corridors. Well-dressed visitors and patrons—giggling stenographers—bearded doctors who might have advertised laxatives in the popular magazines— a typical *Kildare* atmosphere about the place.

They didn't suspect what was going on in the private chamber down the hall. They didn't suspect that the golden girl on my arm was a white witch.

Again that white witch thought had crossed my mind. White witch. Why did I think of Lily that way? Was it because here in the afternoon sunlight she positively glittered? Her hair was *so* golden, her skin had such a milky texture. Ah, she was a pretty girl—nothing more.

"Supper?" I said. She nodded.

We glided down to the lobby, stepped into a cab. She snuggled close. I liked it.

But when I looked at her again, the semi-darkness of the cab's interior had wrought another change.

She wasn't a white witch any more. Her hair seemed darker. The golden tint was gone. The locks were almost brunette; brown with darker tones. The scarlet of her lips had turned to rose. A trick of late afternoon light.

"What are you staring at?" she giggled.

I got personal for a while. A good while, as we were tied up in traffic. By the time we neared the chosen destination it was almost twilight.

IT WAS twilight in the taxi.

And Lily's hair was gray. Not gray, exactly, and not platinum. There was a bluish tint. Her lips were purple.

Her lips were purple—or I was crazy.

Seeing things. A girl who changed in light and shadow. What was that? White witch—black witch—blue witch. What did they call it? Adaptation. Chamelon. But the term in sorcery. *Glamour*. Sympathetic magic. The ability to conform with surroundings. The attribute of a sorceress.

Circe had that power.

But Lily Ross?

Here she was, laughing away, affectionate and alluring. And I was picturing her as an enchantress. Ridiculous.

Well, it was best forgot. I did forget as we entered the supper club. But when we sat down under the red drapes I saw her titian locks flame forth in evil glory, saw her tawny skin glow, saw the crimson depths of her eyes.

Red witch, now!

I had a drink. Several drinks. In between I blinked. She talked, but I hardly listened.

"Let's dance."

I held the red witch in my arms, held a living flame close. Held her closer than I had ever held her, and felt her respond. Her response was flame. Fire kindling, feeding.

That fire engulfed me. I was tired of thinking, tired of toying with the incredible. The wine helped, and her beauty was a greater intoxication. I went down into the warmth—the warmth of her glowing hair, the warmth of her eyes, the red glow of her mouth.

Why deny it? When she suggested her apartment I didn't hesitate. This wasn't the Lily Ross I knew, but the realization no longer bothered me.

She clung to me in the cab, on the stairs. "We've been working too hard, darling," she whispered, over and over again, as though it were a formula. Her words no longer mattered. I was consumed by the flame of her nearness. The red, swift flame, coursing through my blood and being.

She opened the door. I stepped in. We embraced in the darkness for a long moment.

Then, "I've waited for this," she mur-

mured. "You and I, together. We're going to do wonderful things, aren't we?"

"You mean down at Rocklynn?" I asked lazily.

"Oh—*that!*" she laughed. "Of course not, silly! That's child's play. Don't you think so? It has no real meaning at all."

"Well—"

"You and I were meant for greater destinies." Her voice, vibrant in velvet darkness, had a new quality of its own. A *dark* quality. Peculiarly, I wondered what she looked like here. What color was her hair? And those lips, that now burned mine?

Lips that burned away my questions and left only a desire.

"Greater destinies," she whispered. "You've the brains. I have the beauty.

"You know, I've never felt this way before. Today I saw the futility of it—cooped up in a stuffy little laboratory when we might be playing for bigger stakes."

Did you ever have a woman make love to you with lips and arms while she talked like a bank director? It's an unnerving experience.

"Yes, we'll go a long way together. Keith's out of it, of course. We have the power now. The power to learn. The power to command. With those spells and incantations there are no heights we cannot achieve.

"I could be a queen—"

Well, it was enough. Lips or no lips, I knew. The shudder that ran through me could not be repressed. The voice was Lily's but the thoughts were Keith's. Not Keith's—but Keith's when he was possessed of the Devil.

I knew what I held in my arms now. The girl that had worked alone in the black chamber, under the glowing eyes of the monster in the cage. The girl that changed in light and darkness. The girl who desired power, who lured like the priestess of a Mystery.

I knew, and as I shuddered, she knew. Her arms pressed closer, her body moulded to mine, her warmth sought to drown my dread, and I felt her mouth seek mine, seek mine with a promise of ecstasy.

I pushed her back. She sensed it, but suddenly embraced me. Again her mouth neared. I felt it graze my lips and then—Lily Ross bent in the darkness, and with the fury of a tigress, locked her teeth in my throat!

### *9. Devil's Bargain*

AS THE tiny, pointed fangs met, I shook her free.

A feline growl rose in her throat. Her panting breath rasped as her hands raked my face.

"You fool!"

Again her mouth sought my neck. I lifted one arm and let go. I had to do it.

Just a short uppercut to the chin and she slumped to the floor. I stepped over, switched on the lights, and carried her limp body to the sofa.

She lay there, eyes closed, a golden witch under lamplight. From her bruised mouth ran a tiny crimson trickle.

The sleeping sorceress—

I got cold water, a towel, brandy. It took three minutes before her eyes fluttered open. By that time I'd been in her bedroom and found what I was seeking. So when her eyes did open, they focussed directly on the bronze crucifix held before them.

A look of pain seared her face. She writhed.

"No—take it away—please—"

I held her twisting body taut.

"Look!" I commanded.

"No—fool—let me go—I can't—"

The crucifix pressed closer. I placed the cool metal against her forehead.

She screamed.

I drew it off and stared at the livid welt

—the imprint of the cross burned into her white flesh.

Perspiration beaded my brow, but I didn't desist. I knew what had to be done. Exorcism. The casting out of demons.

First Keith, and now Lily. She had to be freed.

Her moanings ceased. I waved the crucifix before her and whispered.

"Lily, darling. Look at the cross. Look at it. I know it hurts, but you must look. You must. Just gaze from under your eyelids. I won't burn you with it. Just look. Look and sleep. Try to sleep, Lily. You're tired, so very tired. So tired. Sleep. And look at the cross. Sleep."

Science and witchcraft, eh? Well, let's see what a little modern hypnotism will do.

Psychic trauma or possession by a fiend, call it what you will. I waved the crucifix and commanded her to sleep. The light glittered on the weaving outline. Her eyes followed it, her ears heard my murmurs.

Lily slept.

MY SHIRT was wet clear through. I was trembling. But she slept. And I kept whispering. "Lily, come back! Lily fight it. Come back. Lily, come back."

The tremors came then. Convulsions. I saw her writhe in agony and still I didn't stop. Didn't dare stop.

She moaned, and it wasn't her voice. Her hands darted like talons to her temples, as though to tear away the scar. Her face was the worst—changing from pallor to deep flush.

But my voice was winning. I felt that. Her whimpers grew weaker. She slept under the cross, accepted the vision.

The force within her waned, then blazed in a final access of fury. That's when my hand trembled so that I nearly dropped the crucifix. When her face began to look like *other* faces.

They bubbled up from beneath her flesh, those malignant expressions of hate and rage. The expressions seen on the faces of the schizophrenic, the demented. The faces of madness—and what was madness in olden days but demoniac possession?

They came now, grinning their defiance. And the voice and the cross fought them, fought them down, fought them from her being.

At the end she slept, and I slumped beside her. The crucifix rested against her bare arm, but it no longer burned. I had won. She had won. I knew that Satan had returned to his body in the glass cage.

In the morning's awakening we made our decision. I told her what she didn't know—and she told me what I had guessed; about the "dizzy spells" she had experienced while working alone in the chamber.

"I'm going back there," I insisted. "You need rest. I'll carry on alone, and I'm forewarned as well as forearmed by what you and Keith have gone through. I won't succumb, I promise you—not until I've found a way to get rid of His Satanic Majesty once and for all."

"Be careful, darling—"

I smiled grimly. "You're telling me? But it has to be done. That menace must be removed, quickly. If you or Keith had been allowed to continue it might spread like a plague. There's no choice in the matter. Either we get rid of Satan or he gets rid of us. That's the bargain."

"You'll call me regularly?"

"Of course. And in a day or two both you and Keith can come down again to help. But now—I'm going back to hell."

Lily smiled. "May God be with you," she whispered.

### *10. Powers of Darkness*

THAT night we worked alone, the Devil and I.

The Devil and I, in that black tower. The red braziers burned as a beacon, but

the red glare from his eyes blazed a still stronger warning.

All alone in the dark room, behind locked doors. A crouching fiend in a cage. A crouching man at a table.

From time to time the ebon monstrosity reared ponderously to pad back and forth behind the barrier. From time to time I rose and paced the floor with equal restlessness.

Frequently a malignant scowl convulsed the black and bony face. Often, I too, scowled.

I turned the yellowed pages of a dozen bulky books. I scanned the notes written in Lily's precise handwriting. But learning the mantic arts is a grim business. No wonder wizards grew gray!

Here was White Magic—the nine steps in the evocation of angels. The command of the Seven Stewards of Heaven; Arathron, Bethor, Phaleg, Och, Hazith, Ophiel, and Phul. White Magic, and a jumble of theosophical arcanum which would be of no use here. Wrong lead.

Black Magic—ashes of hosts and dried toads—unguents of grease and blood of corpses heated over human bones—burning crucifixes—gibberish.

Red Magic? The highest esoteric art was never written or told. Nothing here.

Try divination.

I tried divination for hours. Long hours in the black room.

Long hours under hell-spawned eyes. Eyes that watched me as I studied. Eyes that seemed to pierce the glass cage, to peer over my shoulder as I read, peer and mock.

The file on divination was huge. Could I evoke an omen, a clue? Divination—

There was aeromancy, alectryomancy, aleuromancy, alphitomancy—but I had neither wind nor rooster, flour nor hard dough.

Amniomancy? Use the caul of a newborn child? No. And the horrid anthropomancy—prophecy by use of human entrails—no, again.

Arithomancy, Astragalomancy. Both mathematical tricks, long since discredited. Axinomancy and Belomancy were relics of the old "trial by ordeal" of Saxon days.

Capnomancy? Divination by smoke-wreaths from a drug-sprinkled fire? Hashish visions. A fake.

Cephalonomancy, Dactyliomancy, Gastromancy, Geomancy, Gyromancy. I had no donkey's head to sprinkle with live coals, no finger ring, no gift at ventriloquism, nor was I a sand-diviner. I might try Gyromancy as a last resort—walking in a circle until I grew dizzy and fell. The direction of the fall had significance.

Oh, sure. Sorcery is so fascinating, until you analyze it.

Hippomancy, the Celtic trick with white horses. Out.

Hydromancy, Ichthyomancy, Lampodomancy, Lithomancy, Margaritomancy, Myomancy, Onomancy, Onychomancy, Oomancy, Parthenomancy.

Fine stuff! All superstitious nonsense, though the last—divination by employing a virgin—might prove entertaining.

Well, Pyromancy, Rhabdomancy, Sciamancy.

Sciamancy. Evocation of the dead. Was there a proven formulae here in Lily's list? There wasn't. I was singularly grateful. To command the dead sorcerously—dangerous ground.

Spondonomancy, Sycomancy, Theomancy.

That was the end of divination.

And still Satan stared. I was becoming more and more conscious of that stare. Satan grinned. The grin burned through me. I'd find a way! I had to.

There was no sleep for me that day, and it was almost midnight when I blundered back into the notebooks and hit the section on *Elementals*.

Elementals. The primitive spirits.

The gnomes inherent in earth own the kingdom of the North, and they exert the melancholic influence over the temperament of man. Their sign is the Bull, and they are commanded by the Magic Sword. Their sovereign is Gob.

NONSENSE!

The sylphs are of the air, their kingdom is the East, and their influence bilious. Under the sign of the Eagle, they are controlled by the holy pentacles, as is their sovereign, Paralda.

Well?

Salamanders are spirits of fire, and their kingdom lies South. Sanguine in their influence, under the sign of the Lion, and the command of the trident, their sovereign is Djin—yes, the prototype of all *djinn*.

And the undines of the West, those who evoke the phlegmatic aspect of men, are governed under the sign of Aquarius, commanded by the cup of libations, and under the sovereignty of Necksa.

Gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, undines. Earth, air, fire and water. Astrology and oriental legend, and mysticism.

Except that—there were spells.

Spells for the evocation of elementals. Elementals, known to our theology as fiends. Fiends of the Pit.

Spells to command them, written in Lily Ross's handwriting. Taken from the tomes. Precise directions for mixing incense, and drawing figures, and reciting commands.

"There are nearly a hundred proven spells and incantations. Genuine." That's what Keith had said.

Genuine spells. Recipes to raise daemons. "A pinch of salt and a tablespoonfull of butter. Bake well under low flame."

Not exactly. These recipes might affect the stomach, but only with a nausea of dread. "A pinch of ground bone, and a cup of blood. Place under the fires of Hell."

I was light-headed. Light-headed enough to try.

After all, I had to experiment, didn't I? Find a way to evoke, familiarize myself with rituals? Why shouldn't I take this perfectly absurd routine about the gnomes, for instance, and see what happened?

Lily's marginal notes said, "Sword in cupboard, lower shelf. Important—use no other. Steel sword. Steel alone guards and commands gnomes."

I had the silly-looking old blade in my hand before I knew what I was doing. I had the blue chalk, too, as directed, and I was kneeling down facing North. The gnome kingdom.

Grimm's fairy tales? Why not find out?

Draw the mathematical design, as directed. Draw the sign of the bull—the peculiarly Egyptian sign, so indicative of ancient stylization. The bull of Apis, of astrology, of ancient days. A blue bull. Make it big. The gnome materializes on that sign and cannot leave it until you command. Draw it big and play safe.

Play safe? With this nonsense?

But there was a black bulk in a glass cage grinning out at me and this wasn't nonsense.

I waved the sword. I realized what a ridiculous figure I cut in that dark room, waving a "magic sword" before a lot of chalk drawings scribbled schoolboy-fashion on the floor. But there was nobody to watch me—except the glaring eyes of Satan in his prison.

Slowly I mumbled the incantation. Lily had accented it and phoneticized carefully: No mistakes. Now to recite it aloud. The sword pointed north—thus. My feet touched the tip of the outer blue circle. At the syllable breaks I must point the sword at the horns of the Bull. Sychronize. So.

"Oh Gob—" I began.

It sounded foolish. Self-conscious.

Grimm's fairy tales. But I persisted. It didn't take long, after all.

No. It didn't take long before I felt the cold wind strike my face. Felt the sword tingle in my hand as I pointed, felt an electric surge sweep up my arm. Heard the syllables blaze out, saw the flame of the braziers *bend* before the words.

And then, in the Sign of the Bull, the tiny, crouching figure. It coiled into shape, into substance. The little swarthy creature with the mouse-like face, the rodent body, and the beady, glittering eyes. Standing there, bowing. The gnome.

*Grim* fairy tales!

The gnome. The little man who *was* there. The little man that hid in the woods. The little dwarf man who tempted maidens in the forest. The little man who guarded the mines and the gold of earth, the little man who haunted the dark mountaintops of the north countries and dug the burrows beneath the hills.

One of the ancient Pictish, Celtic *little people*. The tiny race of troglydites that lived on earth before men came, retreated to the dark depths like the serpent. The figure known to all legends and all times. The dwarf. The troll. The kobold. The Brownie. The leprechaun.

"Master?"

Oh, that piping little voice! That shocking, detestable little voice, so hateful in its reality!

And it *was* real.

I dropped the sword.

Then I picked it up. This was the sword of command. Of command. The thought hit me then. I could—command.

I COULD command this creature out of myth, command it to do anything I desired. Anything. To—kill. To burrow under a building and send it toppling to ruins, as he and his fellows toiled like rats. The way they used to burrow under castles, in ancient legend. Like a warlock, I could send it on errands of death. It was my servant, my familiar now. I could have it and its fellows. Yes, thousands of them. Merely by command. Command with the steel of the sword.

The thought burned. Burned like Satan's eyes. Burned like fire.

Fire.

The salamander!

I won't describe the next hour. The wave of elation that swept over me is too much a part of hysteria. I drew the Lion, kindled the flame, waved the trident. The yellow blaze revealed the lizard figure that grew out of flame, absorbed it. Fiend, imp, archetype of hell's legions, the salamander of evil. And the hissing inflection in the word, "Master?"

Here were spells that worked. Here were orisons and litanies that brought results. I couldn't send Satan back, but I could conjure up his hosts.

Conjure up his hosts! Why not? Imagine this tower room filled with waiting monstrosities from myth. Imagine *rooms* filled with them. A horde, a vast and limitless horde, all calling me—"Master!"

Master of demons. Master of evil. Lord of a power greater than any known.

For the first time I began to realize the feeling inherent in that word. Power. Power to rule. Power over wind and water and fire and air. Over earth. Power to rule earth.

Now I knew how Keith must have felt. He'd dreamed of something like this. Men laughed at evil, did they? All the better, they would not burn him at the stake for sorcery but permit him to evoke evil unmolested. He'd been a fool, Keith had. Trying to interest millionaires. Why did he need any allies? One man to rule them all, that was the way.

And Lily. Silly child! Personal vanity was her downfall. She wanted to be a Cleopatra, did she? Sheer melodrama. Juvenile. She might have been a queen—

greater than a Circe. Queen of evil. But I'd stopped that. Her mistake was to rely on me for help.

I wouldn't make that mistake. I'd rely on no one. I and I alone would evoke and rule. I had the power, didn't I? I had Satan in a cage. He was no longer Prince of Darkness. I could take his place.

The King is dead. Long live the King!

Why not?

A week ago, if anyone had foretold my future I should have scoffed. Like everyone else, I suppose. But now it was real, I had this opportunity. The goal of witch and wizard through the ages. The powers of darkness mine to command. Why hesitate?

Why not evoke? Use the rituals, use all of them. Fill the room with a legion of nightmare shapes. *Revenants.* Ghouls and *efrits. Vrykolas, hippocampi, amphisbanae, striges.* An army, a black army. An army to conquer the world.

Keep them ringed in the magic figures, until the word of release was given. Keep them ringed, and then—

But what about Satan? What about the spell to send him back? Back to where—to hell? But we could have hell here on earth!

And why not?

An earth filled with man-made war and misery. An earth filled with grasping, cheating, lying, stealing, raping, murdering, crazy humans. Filled with pestilence, disease, idiocy. Let the Lord of Evil come into his own!

Sweep away humanity. Sweep away the earth. Black gifts the creatures might grant you for the power. Eternal life, eternal ecstasy. Lips might whisper secrets. Primal forces to invoke and control.

Why send Satan back at all?

I glanced at the listless black figure in the cage. Glanced and smiled. Smiled and laughed suddenly.

Was this—this thing—the fabled Lucifer? This mangy, decrepit, listless bag of bones with the sick eyes and whining sneer? Was this whimpering mongrel really the Arch-Enemy?

I felt stronger than he did. I *was* stronger than he. I had stripped him of his power and taken it for my own.

I was the Master of Satan!

Plans, plans, plans. Dreams swirling in the blackness. The salamander staring, the gnome crouching in the chalk-dust. Yes, and I, standing in darkness, chanting out invocations. Chanting for endless hours, gripped by an inner elation and compulsion.

The room, surging with power. Pulsing with vibrations. And filled with shapes.

Until I stood there, amidst a crowded maze of circles and designs, each filled with a figure. A bowing figure that croaked, "Master!"

I stood there and made a Hell on earth.

### *11. Hell on Earth*

"SLOWLY now—it's a surprise."

I guided Lily and Keith toward the door marked *Private.* Keith leaned feebly on my arms, but he pressed forward eagerly.

"Surprise?" gurgled Lily. "You mean—you've sent him back?"

I smiled. "You'll see," I told her.

She and Keith gave me a long look. I didn't like it. They seemed too conspiratorial. Eying me. I'd open their eyes for them in a minute.

I pushed open the door. "Come into my parlor," I said.

Keith kept staring at me. So did Lily.

"Ladies first," I said. Lily suddenly shrugged and stepped in. Keith followed her. I went in and shut the door. Locked it.

Then I faced them.

They faced the room.

They didn't say a word. They couldn't. It was too overpowering.

I'd taken the drapes off, swept the room clear of tables and cupboards. Needed more space. The place reeked with mingled incense odors, but even the braziers were gone to provide more floor area.

Floor area for *visitors.*

They stood there and gazed at Hell. My Hell. The Hell I had created by incantation, by invocation. Around the glass cage housing Satan the legions swarmed. One of each. A Noah's Ark, in a way, of horrors.

Hell's sample-display showroom. Take your pick. Plenty more where these came from.

The thoughts made me laugh. I did laugh, too. The noise grated against the silence, and there was a vast answering response. "Master!"

"What have you done?" Keith's eyes blazed anger.

"Merely played sorcerer's apprentice," I told him. "How do you like it?"

"These—monsters," Keith spluttered. "Do you realize what would happen if you lost control?"

"Certainly." I smiled.

"It's insane," he muttered.

"It's science," I answered. "Isn't this your dream come true? Your dream of proving the validity of sorcery?"

"It's a nightmare. I want no part of this. Send these creatures back—there's directions for that. Send them back at once."

"Change of heart, eh? Well, recognize another change at the same time. You're not giving me orders any more, Keith. I'm in charge here."

Keith paled. He faced me with an intent stare.

Lily stepped between us.

"You must send them back," she whispered. "You were going to get rid of Satan, remember?"

"What do you mean—remember? Do you think I'm a child? Of course I remember that foolishness. But it's no good. Think of the power I possess. Think of what we could do with these creatures."

"Creatures!" Lily quavered the word.

She stood like a golden goddess, surrounded by the bobbing, weaving, crouching shapes of darkness. The tiny men with the malignant faces, the snake-like figures that shimmered in air, the canine visages of ghouls, the monstrous bulk of squatting incubae, the leprous-white crawlers. An aquarium, a menagerie, a gallery of fiends. They filled the room, each in his tiny island of chalk. Behind was the cage with the figure of Satan slumped on the floor. Had he no interest in this gathering? Where was his burning desire to escape? No matter.

"Creatures," Lily quavered, and her glance rested on me in strange appeal. "Darling—for my sake—send them back. You're not well, you've overworked, you can't think what you're doing—"

"Enough." I stepped closer to her. "I'm not crazy, if that's what you mean. Three days in this room hasn't made a wreck out of me. I've learned more about the essence and nature of evil than you both know. And I'm going to use that knowledge and that power."

"The Devil is through, in other words," Keith commented, dryly. "You're taking over."

For a moment the bald statement seemed to paralyze me. As if through a fog I caught his meaning. Then I chuckled.

"That's just about the size of it. From now on, I'm in command. These creatures are my minions. At the signal they will be released."

I lowered my voice.

"I've got a plan. It's all thought out. I've done a lot of thinking here these past days. I know just what to do—how to use these things. Rule, I tell you! And

you two will share the power with me, if you like."

"Send them back," Lily begged. "You don't know what's happening to you."

"Happening to me? I'm waking up, that's all. I feel more alive at this moment than I ever have. I'm strong, and he's weak. I'm going to do what no man has ever dared. I'll open the gates! Lucifer will again rule earth. Why shouldn't he—I mean I—he—*I*—"

THEN I realized.

Realized what I was saying.

I thought, "Satan," and I said, "I."

I. Satan.

I looked at Keith and the girl. Their eyes were fixed in fascination on my face.

My face!

Lily's hand was holding something out.

A mirror.

I took it.

Took the silver glass and stared at my face in the mirror. Stared at the black, goatish countenance, at the growing beard on the chin, stared—transfixed—at the darkened temples from which *the two horns were beginning to protrude!*

What had happened to Keith and Lily had happened to me. Three days in a room with the black man, three days in a room while his will gnawed at my soul in darkness, burrowed in.

The change had taken place. *I was Satan!*

The mirror fell and shattered. I stood there, looking at the dark skin on the back of my hands. The dark skin on the back of my—claws.

Turning, turning; body and mind and soul. Cloud of darkness pouring out of the cage and into my brain.

I was Satan and I had evoked demons and I would rule earth.

Madness!

*But why not?*

Nobody was dashing holy water in *my* face. Nobody was waving any crucifixes. Nobody was shooting any—

I saw it out of the corner of my eye. Keith's holster, with the two guns, lying on the little table near the door. Saw it as he saw it and made a dash. I got there first.

I pulled the guns out and pointed them very carefully. Keith stopped in his tracks.

"No you don't," I chuckled. "No one is shooting me, if you please. Lily—the door is locked. Very tightly." She'd made a dash, too. "We are all alone now. With our—servitors." I chuckled again. It was beginning to feel very pleasant.

"Stand still, both of you," I directed.

"Madman," Keith shouted. "Put down those revolvers!"

"Please—" Lily whispered.

I slipped one weapon into my pocket, held the other high in my right hand. My blackening right hand. I could *feel* it change. I *pulsed*. Every nerve tingling, as the change completed.

One claw held the revolver. The other rose.

"Now, you two. When I lower my left hand, our little playmates will be released. I don't need my right hand for anything but keeping you covered. So remember. Stand and watch."

"Satan!" Keith mumbled. "Satan incarnate!"

"Please, darling," Lily whispered. "Oh, please, darling—"

I laughed. The grinning throng waited behind me. Waited, and ravened. I could feel their pulsations mingling with my own. How they lusted to be free! To walk the earth once more; to walk and creep and crawl and lope and fly and—kill! They waited and they crouched for my command. My command would free them. From the black tower they'd swarm out over the world of night and the shriek of earth in torment would mock the walls of heaven.

The strength welling in me. . . .

I lifted my left hand high. One gesture now—

Then Lily moved.

"Back or I'll shoot!" I screamed.

She came forward. Her eyes held no hate and no fear, only a pleading that burned and burned. I had to get rid of that burning. Kill her, kill her and release them. Free the hordes of Hell!

My left hand swooped. My right hand moved out. The hand of Satan. I flicked my wrist, pressed the trigger—and sent a bullet crashing into my brain.

### *12. Fall of Lucifer*

"EASY," I said. "Easy."

"Must probe," grunted Keith. "Get it out. Silver bullet or no, there might be infection."

"Easy," I repeated. Then, "Are you sure it's gone?"

Lily smiled down at me.

"Of course, darling. They're all gone. And the cage is empty. The instant you fired the gun they disappeared. Not in a cloud of brimstone, either. They just—weren't there."

I smiled. It wasn't so hard, because Keith had the little silver pellet out.

"Lucky shot," he commented. "Just missed grazing the parietal lobe."

"I still can't understand it," I said. "Can't understand what made me shoot myself and why Satan disappeared."

"The oldest story in the world," answered Keith. "Virtue triumphant. It fought the evil in you and won, even though you weren't conscious of it. When Lily came toward you the battle was resolved. You and the Devil fought it out in your own soul, and you won.

"And that was the secret of getting rid of Satan. The human soul pitted itself naked against his will and denied him."

I shook my head as Keith continued.

"Evil preys on inner weakness. In my case, Satan focussed his forces on my dominant quality of ambition. That ambition, directed sanely, caused me to embark on scientific research. Perverted just a little, Satan made my ambition become a lust for power at any price.

"In Lily's possession, her natural feminine vanity was accentuated to the point where she desired utter adoration. Again the psychology of evil came into play. And when the Devil invaded you, he worked through your love of learning, turning your scholarly inclinations into the field of sorcery."

"It's hard to believe now," I said. "Maybe it was all a mass hallucination. Those old wive's tales—"

Keith chuckled.

"Perhaps what we saw and called Satan *wasn't* physically real. We each saw a different figure in the glass cage, and Considine and Wintergreen might have had their own concepts. Even these creatures you materialized might be merely focal imaginative visions.

"But this I know. Whether we choose to personify it as Satan, or the Devil, or the Powers of Darkness—evil exists as a force in this world of ours. Describe it in terms of witchcraft or psychiatry as you will—evil is real."

Lily laid her head on my shoulder. "Let's forget it all now," she suggested.

"Suits me. Got any methods to suggest?"

"Well, if you're not too sick—"

"Too sick? I feel swell."

"Well, if you're not too sick, I suggest we celebrate."

"Fine idea," I responded.

"Sure," said Keith. "Let's go out and raise hell! Why—what's the matter?"

"Nothing at all," I replied; and promptly fainted.

# Night Must Not Come

*By*
*ALLISON V. HARDING*

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

*Ever since the birth of time fires have been kept at night and man has never allowed complete darkness, for evil things are waiting out there beyond the light.*

HEAD defense warden Charles Higgins of Sector 6 looked up as two of his subordinates came into the OCD office.

One of them, a middle-aged woman, white helmet covering gray hair, plumped down into a chair near Higgins' desk. Her companion, a short, swarthy man stood leaning against the wall.

"How long to go, Chief?" The woman spoke.

Higgins glanced at a card on his desk. "We'll get the sirens at 8:15."

The three lapsed into silence. In a few minutes, other wardens entered the office. Higgins spoke to some, nodded to others. He had reason to be proud of his district and his wardens. They were well organized for tonight's job. In less than a quarter of an hour New Dixon, large Eastern metropolis would have its first city-wide blackout. For the first time all the millions of diversified lights would go out. All activity would cease, there would be complete darkness.

Higgins looked around the room appraisingly. His two deputies—the housewife, Mrs. Carey, the stocky corner grocer, Mr. Adreco—were, like the others, plain citizens banded together in a common

cause. He was proud of them all, he thought, as he silently went through the roll call. All were present but his first deputy, Professor James Everett of New Dixon College.

The head defense warden frowned a bit to himself. Everett had been worrying him lately. To be sure, the professor had been one of the first to join up and had always proven himself an enthusiastic volunteer. But recently he had skipped a few meetings. And only yesterday when Higgins had mentioned the blackout scheduled for tonight Everett had seemed very perturbed at the news. Oh well, these professors of Sociology were unpredictable. Everett would be all right.

Higgins' train of thought was brought back to the immediate as he heard his name called imperatively from the hall. All eyes were on the door as Professor Everett hurried in. His face was feverish and his small frame beneath his rumpled suit seemed to quiver with excitement as he headed for Higgins. He leaned over the desk for a moment to catch his breath.

"Professor, why haven't you your equipment," Higgins started to remonstrate, noting the other's dress, "Man, you know we've got this drill coming up in a few minutes."

Everett had caught his breath somewhat now. Ignoring the question, he clutched the chief's arm. "Listen, Mr. Higgins, that's what I've got to tell you. The drill . . . we've got to stop it. Do you understand me, we can't have the blackout!" So saying Everett collapsed into a chair.

FOR a moment nobody spoke. Higgins noted that the other wardens in the room showed the same astonishment and bewilderment that he felt. Charles Higgins rose to the occasion. He came around his desk, smiling, and laid his hand on Everett's shoulder.

"I know how it is. We're all keyed up, I'll confess I am. But once we get on the job that'll all disappear. Now you get your equipment, Professor, and we'll go over the assignments once more. I want our district to be 100 per cent. Come on, man, we haven't got much time."

Everett shuddered and then visibly took hold of himself. He straightened in his chair and then spoke, making an effort to keep his voice level.

"Higgins, I've stumbled on something. There isn't time to explain, but we've got to call off tonight's blackout."

"Impossible," the chief snapped. "If you're feeling ill, we'll get along without you. I'll get one of the others to take your post."

"It isn't that, I'm all right. It's just that I know we're making a terrible mistake. We've got to call this thing off until some kind of investigation can be made. There's something . . . something I don't understand."

The other wardens were staring incredulously. Higgins could see they didn't know quite how to take the actions of the usually dignified reserved professor. The sector head was as puzzled himself.

"In heaven's name, Professor, what do you mean? What kind of investigation . . . and of what?"

Everett spoke now with an effort, "An investigation of the forces that I am convinced will be loosed on this city if we put all the lights out tonight!"

Mrs. Carey smiled and spoke accusingly, "Now, Professor, don't tell us you're afraid of the dark?" It was a relief to hear the answering chuckles from the others. Higgins turned again to Everett.

"Now listen, Professor Everett, we are—"

"You've got to hear me," Everett broke in. "Let me finish. Ever since the birth of time, ever since the birth of man, fires were kept at night. Complete darkness was never allowed by any tribe in any age. Areas

where cities grew up are particularly susceptible to these forces. Always a little light was kept somewhere. And as time passed and the cities developed, always through the darkness there would be lights. Of course, it was natural in a city to have light. Don't you see, though, that this was more than a coincidence. For lights and movement are the only protection against forces of darkness. And we're going to defy this. For the first time in the ages since man has lived on this earth, tonight there will suddenly be no lights, no lights at all—no street lights, no midnight pinpricks of illumination on top of skyscrapers—just blackness."

In his business as well as in this volunteer capacity, Higgins was essentially a practical man of action. His first interest was in calculating the effect this scene was going to have on his wardens and their part in tonight's drill.

He put his arm around Everett's shoulders. "Come on, you'd better go back up to your apartment."

Everett brushed the arm away. He then pulled out of his pocket a red-leather faced book, placed it on the desk.

"See this?" he opened the ancient book.

HIGGINS bent over to read the almost illegible title, "Kendl's Theories of Tribal Folklore." Everett's hands shook as he thumbed to a section in the middle of the book. Some of the leaves were held together with transparent tape and the entire volume looked about to fall apart.

Everett stabbed his finger at a passage on one yellow page.

Higgins bent lower, straining his eyes to read where the professor indicated.

". . . it must be concluded that areas where early tribal gatherings took place were thought to be evil, particularly after sundown. Many persons were needed in these areas where no man dare lie down alone and sleep unguarded through the night—always some were needed to tend the fires that stood between those gathered in these locations and the strange powers of darkness. It is logical to presume that these forces, inherent in darkness, and responsible for the instinctive fear that humans have always held for the dark, will always be a potential threat to mankind.

"In the future, let no one ignorant of these traditions forget the essential duty—to keep light always somewhere in the darkness.

"For man has a stake in this eternal struggle between light and dark—the stake is his very existence. . . ."

As Higgins read to himself, the slow, rising note of a siren growled out of the night into the little room. Instantly, the wardens went into action. Adreco grabbed the lever to turn off the street lamp in the front. Everett, realizing perhaps that he was too late in his warning message pulled himself together and reached for his helmet. Higgins noted with relief that he seemed determined to go through with his duty.

The chief warden issued last instructions, reached for his own helmet, and followed Everett into the street. Once outside the building, the wardens deployed to their posts.

Higgins noted with satisfaction the way apartment and dwelling lights were snapping out within a few seconds of the first warning. But he noticed that Everett, whose post was down at the corner, seemed reluctant to move away from the street light. The professor was scared. That was obvious.

In a few minutes, the surrounding buildings were completely dark. Higgins frowned down at the dial of his watch. In a few more minutes the second note of the siren should sound the red warning. This would mean all lights out, traffic would stop, and pedestrians would have to seek shelter

Everett was still near him.

"Come on, Professor, get down to the corner," he ordered.

Everett hung back. "Listen, Higgins, just one thing. Let's leave this light on here in the street."

"You're crazy! I know my instructions. Now get down to your post and see this thing through. You're setting a helluva example, Everett. I thought you'd be a man to fulfill your responsibilities to the fullest. Instead of that, I find you've cooked up some cock and bull story about what will happen if we turn all the lights out."

Without a further word Everett turned and trudged off down the street. Higgins pulled at his chin reflectively. It was puzzling. A man like Professor Everett! His thoughts were pulled back to the job at hand by the sudden, rising crescendo of the sirens again.

IMMEDIATELY Adreco moved to the street light and put it out. Another warden, Ed Harley, down on the avenue, motioned some pedestrians into a shelter with a brief flash of his torch.

Gradually the noise of the huge city slackened and stopped. One by one the last remaining lights winked out. The darkness of the first warning period now became an impenetrable blackness.

Higgins himself felt a sudden feeling of depression. Here he was in the heart of a city of millions—and yet he might as well be alone on a desert isle. Or the millions around him might as well have died!

He shook himself of this mood. By God, he was letting that crazy professor affect him. He must make the rounds of his post now. Higgins realized with a sudden feeling of surprise that his other wardens had seemingly dissolved into the blackness. Even Adreco, nearest him, was invisible. Higgins started cautiously along the street. He almost ran into the lamppost.

"Joe," he called. "Joe Adreco, where are you?"

There wasn't a sound. Adreco was probably back near the building wall. Higgins moved on. Three dwellings down—he knew each post by heart—was Mrs. Carey. She should be in front of the apartment there. Higgins groped his way, not wanting to use his light. Suddenly after several more steps he realized that he must have walked by the house where she should have been. . . . Higgins began to walk more rapidly. The sound of his footsteps echoed dully from side to side of the street. At last he nearly tripped over the corner in the dark. Everett's post. Where was Everett? Higgins groped his way for a few yards either way and found nobody. An eerie thought came to him. His wardens had disappeared . . . in fact everybody had disappeared, he was alone!

For a moment he tried to grasp the situation and then cold sweat began to mat his forehead. . . . How could this be? Ed Harley, the wise-cracking member of his corps, surely he was at his post. . . . Higgins stumbled on a bit further and felt for the railing that ran around an old brownstone house off the corner. He knew every inch of this neighborhood, yet in the blackness it seemed strangely alien. His feet dragged over the uneven concrete pavement as he stumbled forward. He would allow himself one brief snap of his flashlight. After all, he could chance that.

HE TURNED his light toward where the row of brownstone buildings should be and snapped the switch shortly. The triggered beam of light darted out for a few short feet and then was diffused and lost in layers and layers of blackness. He couldn't see any row of houses. He couldn't see anything.

Higgins was a logical man, though. Of course, a fog must have come up, Ed, well, Ed must be here somewhere in this murk.

"Ed!" Higgins kept his voice down. "Ed, where are you?"

The sound of his own voice beat back at him as though the wet, oppressive curtain of night were a sounding board.

"I'll be damned," Higgins spoke to himself and straightened his shoulders. He was not the kind of man to be panicked by things that temporarily, at least, were . . . well, peculiar. But he wondered at the coldness that he felt in his arms and legs and the dampness of his forehead and hands.

After all, where were his wardens? In sector tests before this, they had always stuck to their posts. It was incredible that all of them should be off post at the same time. It was impossible. His mind flashed back to Professor Everett and his warning before the test. What had the old fool meant with his ancient book of folklore?

All this time Higgins had been stumbling forward and suddenly his outstretched hand came in contact with the rail he had been seeking. He gripped its dripping wet roundness and hung on. He realized why he hadn't been able to see anything . . . this was a heavy, dripping fog . . . thick, like, well, almost like some strange gas.

Higgins tried to shrug away the depression that oozed over him with the same stealth as the fog. He must get along back to post. With carefully rationed pricks of light from his torch he found his way up the street. And again he met no one where three, four of his wardens should have been. He finally gained the entrance to sector headquarters and stumbled in the doorway and down the hall to the blacked-out door of their office. He went in, closing the door behind him. He was irritated at the way his hand shook as he reached out to turn on the small desk light.

As the light flicked on, Higgins felt a new surge of confidence. Even so, he staggered as he headed over toward the basin in the corner. He stared at himself incredulously in the mirror over the basin. His face was a dead white, his eyes dilated. God Lord, what had happened to him out there in the darkness?

JOE ADRECO turned the street light off in the same precise way he handled the scales in his grocery store. He had practiced this many times before and there was nothing to it. As he completed this job he moved back from the lamppost somewhat and into the area assigned to him in front of a row of tenements. He marveled at the sudden slowing down of the tempo of the city . . . and finally the utter silence. He looked up the street to his left where head warden Charles Higgins should be. Adreco was amazed at the impenetrable blackness. Of course, there was no moon tonight and it was a bit cloudy, but this fog that seemed to begin to swirl around him was a new wrinkle. It hadn't seemed thick a few minutes ago. Adreco shrugged and kept his sharp eyes peeled for any movement or light.

The silence and blackness were oppressive. Once he called out, "Mr. Higgins! Chief, are you there?" There wasn't any answering sound. It was as though Adreco was completely alone, on guard in a cemetery. . . . It was funny, there was something kinda scary about all this, thought Adreco, and the old professor was to blame, shooting his head off before the drill the way he had.

All of a sudden Adreco got a funny feeling, it was as though somebody had him by the throat, it was hard to breathe—Adreco shook himself angrily. What was this? He wasn't getting scared?

Still, this fog was fierce—like breathing water. Adreco moved down the street, to the next post where Mrs. Carey was supposed to be. Their posts bordered. Mrs. Carey would have something bright to say, she of warm face and motherly nature.

Adreco beamed his torch ahead and through the swirling mist, picked out the spot where Mrs. Carey was posted . . . he gaped. Mrs. Carey off her post! That was unthinkable. But she wasn't to be seen.

Adreco called, "Mrs. Carey. Heh!"

His voice sounded little and futile. Adreco felt scared. By God, he *was* alone. Where were those others? Where was the sector chief and Mrs. Carey?

Joe gripped his light and huddled down into his overcoat. The fog moved around him and settled down like a damp cloak. Joe wished he was home, upstairs over his store . . . where there was warmth and brightness again.

MRS. CAREY had the row of buildings at the near-end of the block. With satisfaction, she noted the lights all out inside. Down the street she could barely discern Higgins and Adreco standing near the street light. As the second siren sounded she saw Adreco go to the light and turn it off. And then she could see no more. The figures of Adreco and Higgins snapped from view like images on a movie screen suddenly gone blank.

As she waited, Mrs. Carey pulled her collar up to protect her throat from the extreme dampness. Funny, she hadn't noticed the fog earlier in the evening. Pretty soon, Higgins would come by, inspecting the posts. She'd be glad to see anybody, it was so lonely . . . even that crackpot Everett. What had he meant with all that funny talk earlier?

Time passed and still no Higgins. Mrs. Carey wondered if he had missed her as he walked by in the stygian blackness. That seemed impossible, still she thought she'd walk down toward the street lamp to see if Adreco had seen him.

It was then she realized the density of the air and blackness. She inched forward until finally she bumped her shoulder into the street light.

"Joe," she called. "Oh, Joe." That was strange. Adreco off his post, too. Mrs. Carey shrugged and resumed her cautious walk up the street. No Higgins either. Very strange. Only her old aunt believed in disappearing acts; she must have missed Adreco and Higgins in the dark.

She wished this drill was over. And was it her imagination, or was the air getting heavier, pounding down on her head like pressured steam? Mrs. Carey put her fingers to her ears and grimaced. That professor and his stories would have them all believing in bogey tales.

PROFESSOR EVERETT went off down the street with Higgins' last words stinging him. Yet he had tried to do his best. He had tried to warn them. He gripped more tightly at the old leather-faced book he was holding: "Kendl's Theories of Tribal Folklore." It was a fascinating work based on the entire history of tribal customs in this country. Indians, Dutch, French, English. Fascinating, that is, until Everett had stumbled on those fateful paragraphs tucked away in the middle of the volume and had done some thinking. But how could he make the others believe him? As he reached his post at the corner, he turned and looked back down the street. He could see a shadow in the darkness that must be Mrs. Carey. Beyond, he could see the faint light in the distance; the two figures beneath were Higgins and Adreco. Then Everett heard the second siren signal and the faraway dot of light from the street lamp flicked out.

Despite himself, Everett began to shake in the thick, chill air. From nowhere a fog seemed to build up around him. Good Lord, it was black. He beamed his light briefly at the ground. The concrete walk beneath him looked yellow and evil. He wondered when this damn thing would be over. And Higgins, Higgins should be coming by soon, shouldn't he?

Everett inched back to the front of the corner building. He placed his back against the round iron railing that ran its width. The fog was getting worse. The air was so laden with a reeking humidity that it was hard to breathe. Everett felt an indescribable loneliness. It was hopeless to fight any longer; he froze where he stood, his fingers stiffening on his torch, straightening, the torch dropping with a faraway thud to the sidewalk. He opened his mouth to cry out but he couldn't. He wheezed with the effort to get air . . . his other hand went rigid, the old book slipped from his fingers, and then the fog swept down over him, covering him up with layers and layers of suffocating black dampness.

ON THE all clear Higgins got up from his desk again. By now he had pulled himself together. He was annoyed at himself and at the results of the whole evening. He went out the door to the front of the building. There was Adreco turning on the street light.

"Where were you, Joe?" Higgins cracked rather irritably.

"Never budged but once, Chief, except to mosey down to Mrs. Carey's post. Guess I missed her in the murk though." For up the street coming toward them was the redoubtable Mrs. Carey.

Higgins sniffed the air. Strange, but the fog seemed to have disappeared as quickly as it had come. Just then two figures rounded the corner. One was Warden Harley. The other was a patrolman.

Harley called something that Higgins couldn't quite catch.

"What," Higgins answered.

Harley came up puffing and blowing.

"It's Everett."

Higgins repeated, "What?"

"He's dead," Harley waved down to the corner. The patrolman nodded, eyes on a notebook in which he was writing.

Higgins half ran down to the corner. The streets were still virtually empty. A first aid helper was standing by Everett. The professor was lying on his back right under the railing.

"He's dead, all right," observed the first aider. Higgins dispatched a messenger for a doctor. In a few minutes a physician from the block showed up. Examination revealed that Everett had apparently died from a heart attack. The blackout test had been too much for him.

It was a sober little group of wardens that trouped into the headquarters of Sector 6.

The news of Everett's death had come to each of them as a shock . . . for despite his eccentricities, the professor had always been an amiable and hard worker in their group.

Suddenly Higgins thought of something. He questioned Harley closely. No, nothing had been found near Everett. Higgins waited until the wardens had left the office and then called Police Headquarters. No, no book had been found among the professor's effects.

The following day Higgins obtained permission to go through Professor Everett's room up at New Dixon College. Everett had been a bachelor and his small room overlooking the quadrangle was spartan in appearance. But nowhere was there a sign of "Kendl's Theories of Tribal Folklore."

On a hunch, Higgins went to the school library. The librarian showed interest im-

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mediately on mention of Everett's name and, after offering some words of sympathy and admiration for the professor, went to his records.

Yes, Everett had borrowed Kendl's "Theories." And the book had not been returned! Only the fact that Professor Everett had been a staff college member enabled the college to lend out this book as it was a rare relic, and so far as known, there was only one copy in print. The librarian shook his head at the news Higgins offered that no trace of the book had been found.

"But nobody ever read the book except Professor Everett," he consoled himself and Higgins. "None of the students had reason to call for it. And the professor was the only member of the staff to use it. Of course, a rare book like that; it's most unfortunate. What do you suppose could have happened?" The librarian shook his head.

BEING as diligent and painstaking in his volunteer defense work as he was in his own business, Charles Higgins soon caught the eye of those public officials always on the lookout for men of ability who are willing to serve a good cause. Within a fortnight of the city-wide test, Higgins had been named as assistant director of the whole Eastern area.

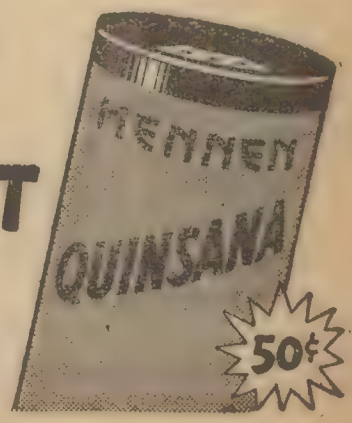
He brought to his new job a stern efficiency, an uncomfortably clear remembrance of the first complete blackout of a large city and certain definite convictions. It was he, for instance, who initiated a more liberal ruling on lighting in the great cities.

With official approval, he ordained that certain traffic and guide lights were to stay on;, and, mindful of the numerous inexplicable accidents among wardens in the first complete blackout, these volunteers should henceforth be allowed a freer use of their hand torches.

To his new job—and just possibly influencing his decision, although he would have been the last to admit this—Higgins also brought a vivid memory of a page in an old book that had vanished in the darkness; a page warning those in cities ever to keep guardian lights through the night.

NEW SUCCESS OVER ATHLETE'S FOOT

NEW SCIENTIFIC 2-WAY TREATMENT WITH **QUINSANA** POWDER -ON FEET AND IN SHOES – IS PRODUCING AMAZING RESULTS. IN TESTS ON THOUSANDS OF PERSONS, PRACTICALLY ALL CASES OF ATHLETE'S FOOT CLEARED UP IN A SHORT TIME.



# The Dai Sword

*By*
***MANLY WADE WELLMAN***

"LOTS of shops, lots of private collectors would like to bid on it," the little straw-tinted man assured Thunstone, "but I felt that you—the sort of man you are, with occult knowledge and interests—ought to have first refusal."

In his comfortable chair by the club window, Thunstone was almost as tall sitting down as was the straw-tinted man standing up. Thunstone's long broad hand took the pipe from under his clipped dark mustache, Thunstone's wide gloomy eyes studied the curved sword that had been laid on the magazine stand. From the chair opposite, young Everitt was leaning forward to look, too.

"Arabian sword?" asked young Everitt. He liked to slide himself into private discussions. His father had been a director

*. . . and a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood*

**Heading by A. R. TILBURNE**

of this club, and an acquaintance of Thunstone. Young Everitt wanted to be a personal friend, or anyway said so. Thunstone was slow about admitting men and women to his personal friendship. He hated to be prejudiced about things like eyes being too close together, but he was. And young Everitt's bright, small eyes were very close together indeed.

"It is a sword from Nepal," the straw-tinted man was informing Everitt. "A sword of the warrior class, peculiar to the Dais. They are an offshoot, a schism one might say, of the Gurkhas."

"I thought Gurkhas were those little pickle things," smirked Everitt at Thunstone, who smiled back but not very broadly. "Why is this sword worth so much?"

"Because it is a thing of ritual," replied the straw-tinted man. "Because there are so few such swords ever offered for sale. Because," and his pale little forefinger tapped the wire-bound hilt, "it is set with precious jewels."

At the word "jewels," young Everitt bounded eagerly out of his chair and bent to look more closely.

"Jewels, all right," he agreed, as if he had been requested to pass judgment. "Not awfully good ones, though. There's a flaw in the ruby. And those emeralds, I'm not very wrought up about them." He scowled, and his close-set eyes seemed to crowd each other even more. "The one on the pommel, the dull one set in silver—what is it?"

"A Dai stone," said the straw-tinted man. His eyes, which were also straw-tinted, turned to seek Thunstone's. He did not seem to like Everitt.

"Dai—dye?" echoed Everitt. "You ought to dye it, some brighter color." Again he chuckled over his own pun. "Never heard of one."

"From the name of that stone the Dais take the name of their sect. . . . I wouldn't draw the sword, not now."

But Everitt had already cleared the blade from its scabbard of brass-studded leather. The steel shone as with frantic scrubbing and polishing. Thunstone, returning his pipe to his mouth, fancied that he could mirror his own square face in that brightness. The curve of the blade was double-edged, not only on the outer arc but the inner curve, which was almost as abrupt as that of a fish hook. And the point itself looked deadly sharp, like the sting of a wasp.

"I am afraid," said Thunstone gently, "that I'm not a good prospect for the sale. May I ask where you got such a specimen?"

The straw-colored man shook his head. He might have been deploring Thunstone's refusal, or declining to tell the history of his acquisition. "I had hoped," he said after a moment, "that you would be interested in the history of the Dais."

"I know a little about the Dais," Thunstone replied, still gently. "Not much, but a little. I am not of their faith, and I have no use for so peculiar a part of it as a Dai sword."

EVERITT suddenly squealed out an oath, not proper language in that quiet and conservative club room. Still holding the drawn sword in one hand, he furiously wrung the fingers of the other.

"I was just going to put it back in the sheath," he told them, "and—but you can see for yourself!"

Had he been years younger, you would have said that Everitt pouted. He thrust his hand under Thunstone's nose. The quivering thumb had been punctured at the center of the ball, and blood trickled in a shiny thread. Thunstone meditated that no artificial scarlet can come near the brightness of fresh blood. Drawing his hand back, Everitt sucked the thumb scowlingly, like a bad-tempered baby.

"Of course," said the straw-tinted man, taking the sword and sheathing it without mishap, "the Dais would find that accident a fortunate one for you."

"Fortunate?" repeated Everitt thickly, past the thumb in his mouth.

It was Thunstone who said: "As I understand it, a Dai blade must never be drawn except for the shedding of blood. The sect insists that bloodless drawing is the worst of ill luck."

"And, should they draw for polishing or sharpening only, or for exhibition only," amplified the straw-tinted man, "they will prick themselves deliberately, just as you did just now inadvertantly, to avert the ill

luck." He weighed the sheathed weapon in his hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Thunstone, that you are not interested. As I suggested before, perhaps I should show it to a collector or—"

"Wait," said Everitt.

He had taken his thumb out of his mouth. His narrow-set eyes watched a new bead of blood as it slowly formed on the wet skin. When he spoke again, he sounded ill-humored. "If Thunstone doesn't want the thing, maybe I do. How much for it, Mister?"

Thunstone, refilling his pipe, watched. The straw-tinted man remained silent for a moment. Finally he named a sum, and he sounded as though he were trying to ask too much. Everitt snorted.

"That's pretty steep," he said. 'What about—"

"I cannot bargain."

"Then I'll take it." With his unwounded hand, Everitt produced a wallet of dark brown leather, and opened it. "Prefer cash, do you." He flipped out some bills. "Keep the odd six dollars for your trouble in coming up here."

"I never accept tips," the straw-tinted man said tonelessly. From his own wallet, a foreign-looking fold made to accommodate notes of another size and shape than American money, he counted out a five and a one. He gazed for a moment at the sword, at Thunstone, and at Everitt. He bowed, or rather nodded, like a toy with a moveable head.

"May I wish you good luck with this purchase," he said, and passed the sword to Everitt. "It is very rare and curious in this part of the world. Thank you."

When he had departed, Everitt looked sharply at Thunstone.

"I suppose," he said, "you want to know why I bought this little gimmick."

"I don't believe in requiring explanations from people," replied Thunstone.

"Well, I'm a rationalist and an empiricist," announced Everitt, who was neither. "I'll show you, and show everybody, that this isn't any magic tool—it's just so much metal and bad jewelry, put together in a funny shape." He studied his thumb again. "The bleeding's already stopped. This time I won't be so clumsy."

Picking up the sword, he drew it with a rather stagey flourish. Even in Everitt's fist, unschooled to swords, it balanced perfectly. Its blade again caught silvery lights. Thunstone speculated as to what alloy had gone to its smelting and forging. Everitt smiled rather loftily, and dipped the curved point back into the sheath, smacking the blade smartly home. An instant later he had dropped the sword, swearing more loudly than before.

"I've cut myself again!" he cried sulkily.

MR. MAHINGUPTA, when visited that evening by John Thunstone, made him welcome in his study as he would have welcomed less than ten other Occidentals. Mr. Mahingupta was smaller even than the straw-tinted man, with a youthful slimness and spryness utterly deceptive; for he was old and wise, nobody this side of the seas knew quite how old and how wise. His brilliant eyes slanted a bit in the finest of brown faces, and his clothes were exquisitely tailored without extremity of cut. He offered cigarettes and a little silver cup of brandy that must have been quite as old as he himself.

"To call the Dais an offshoot of the Gurkha cult is pure ignorance," he answered Thunstone's query, in accents more Oxonian than Herbert Marshall's. "We Gurkhas aren't a cult at all, sir. In faith we are Hindu, and in blood mixed Aryan and Mongol. As Rajputs—men of the warrior caste—we maintain a certain individuality, of course. You know that Gurkha record in many wars." Mr. Mahingupta sighed, perhaps remembering campaigns and stricken fields of his distant youth. "Far too many people misunderstand the East and, misunderstanding, loudly persuade others to misunderstand also."

"Then there is no different quality to the way the Gurkha worship?" prompted Thuntstone. "Different, that is, from orthodox Hinduism?"

'The difference is in descent and training only," Mr. Mahingupta assured him. "In the remote beginning, great Brahma fathered the various castes. From his mouth issues the first of the priests, hence their wisdom. From his right arm was born Shatria, first of my warrior forbears, hence our

strength. Merchants sprang from his thighs, laborers and mechanics from his feet."

Thunstone had heard all that years before. "The Dais," he pursued. "Are they also of warrior caste?"

Mr. Mahingupta's mouth-corners turned up briefly and thinly. "Who can say whence they came? In Nepal exist many of them, in towns close to the Himalayas. For all I know, or anyone knows, they may descend from the abominable ice-devils. As to their claims of power I may not judge. I do not like them, and neither would you, I hope."

"I told you of the Dai jewel in the hilt of the sword. What is it?"

"Jewels," said Mr. Mahingupta, "should be cleanly dug up from under ground, not evoked by magical formula. I do not have patience with such strange chemistry or alchemy or whatever. From what I hear, every Dai stone is of artificial origin, or anyway of preternatural origin. I saw but one in my life." The lips pursed, still harshly. "It served as the single eye of an excessively unpleasant little statue. I dug it out as a gesture of defiance toward those who worshipped the thing. This happened more than your lifetime ago, but see."

He extended a slender, delicate hand. The brown forefinger was crooked as from a bad fracture, and seamily scarred as from deep burns. That was all Mr. Mahingupta said about the adventure, and probably not even Everitt would have urged him to say more. Mr. Mahingupta lifted his brandy cup.

"Though I despise and denounce the Dai worship and all it claims," he went on, "yet I am fraid that the unhappy young man you mention is as good as dead now, for his idiocies. Be comforted that civilization will advance unhampered by such a clumsy fool and boor. I regret, my dear friend, that I can help you no further."

"You mean that you can't," asked Thunstone, "or that you won't?"

"Both," said Mr. Mahingupta.

THE night was not too far spent when Thunstone left Mr. Mahingupta, and he called on young Everitt.

Everitt's quarters were what might stand for the popular idea of a bachelor apartment. It was a place in the eighties, with a large living room, two bedrooms to one side, and a kitchen with a long-idle range, an electric refrigerator, and rows and rows of liquor bottles. On the walls of the living room hung various consciously male paraphernalia—crossed foils, boxing gloves, hockey sticks, none of which Everitt knew how to use. Higher up were fastened the stuffed heads of animals Everitt had not himself killed. Everitt wore a wine-dark robe with a luxuriantly folded white scarf, and greeted Thunstone with a cordiality over-warmed by drink.

"So you found the way up here at last," he said. "What'll you have? Cocktail? Swizzle? Name it and I'll fix it."

"Nothing, thanks," demurred Thunstone, who would rather savor in retrospect the brandy Mr. Mahingupta had given him. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd see how your hand was doing. That second cut was pretty bad."

Everitt drew from the pocket of his robe the hand in question. It was taped over the ball of the thumb, and most of the palm was swaddled in criss-crossed gauze.

"The doctor asked me if I'd been bitten," he said. "It got kind of inflamed or infected—Lord! How he hurt me with that germicide stuff!" Everitt bit his lip at the memory.

Thunstone looked closely at the hand. The fingers were flushed and a bit swollen, but he could not judge if they were dangerously sore. Everitt slid the hand back into his pocket, and nodded at the wall.

"Anyway, there it hangs. How does it look?"

He had tacked up a square of figured Indian cloth, and on this was displayed the Dai sword, drawn and slanted across its own sheath. Again Thunstone remarked the silvery glow of the metal, almost like the glow of great heat. Thumb tacks held blade and sheath in place, and one of these at the pommel was red. No, that was the stone that had seemed so dull in the club. It gave off a color-tint both flushed and gloomy like —well, like a drop of blood gone a little stale.

"That jewel on the hilt does catch the light funny, doesn't it?" said Everitt,

watching Thunstone. "And I thought it was dull."

Thunstone took a step nearer the wall. "You drew it again, I see. Maybe you're wise not to return it to the sheath."

"I think it looks better displayed like that," explained Everitt, lighting a cigarette. "I'll sheathe it again, though, any time I feel like it. Right now, if you like, just to show you I'm not afraid."

"I wish," said Thunstone, "that a man I know were here to look at the thing. His name's E. Hoffmann Price."

"The writer?" Everitt's scorn for all who wrote was manifest.

"He's more than that," replied Thunstone. "For one thing, he's an accomplished fencer and understands swords thoroughly. He's likewise a recognized student of the Orient, and as for occult matters, he's an expert."

"Bring him around some time if you like," granted Everitt, "but don't let him think he could buy the thing back from me. At first I felt I was overpaying; but didn't somebody or other say that it isn't what you pay for anything that sets its value—it's whether you still want it after you've bought it—"

"Apparently you still want it, then," suggested Thunstone.

"Wouldn't be without it," Everitt assured him airily. "And, just to show that I'm perfectly ready to sheathe it at any time—"

He extended a hand toward the hilt with the flushed jewel. At that instant the doorbell rang.

Everitt went to open the door. There stood the straw-tinted man.

"I am sorry to call so late," he greeted them, "but I wish to rectify a mistake. It seems," and he gulped, "that I had no right to sell that Dai sword."

HIS straw tint was paler than it had been, as though straw had been coated with frost. His eyes caught the sheen of the weapon on the wall. "There it is," he said eagerly. "May I return the money and have it back?"

"You may not," Everitt told him.

"I say that I should not have sold it."

"You've found that out a trifle late," Everitt reminded, mixing himself a new drink. "Anyway, the sale's completed. Thunstone here was a witness to the transaction. I paid you money, which you put in your pocket, and that was that."

"I'll pay you a difference of—"

"No," said Everitt.

"I'll double the sum—"

"If it's worth that much for you to buy back, it's worth that much for me to hang onto." Everitt grinned and squinted. "I don't need money, Mister, but I've a liking for the sword."

The straw-tinted man lifted his shoulders wearily. Very narrow, thin shoulders they seemed just then. He faced Thunstone appealingly. "Persuade your friend," he begged.

"Thunstone knows that I won't change my mind," said Everitt. "Some people call me stubborn, some that I'm just determined. "Take your choice, but I won't sell you your sword again. If you stole it, or otherwise acted illegally, that's your funeral, not mine. Now, how about a drink? Drinking's a good way to end any argument."

The straw-tinted man shook his head and turned back to the door.

"Wait," Thunstone called to him. "I'm coming with you." To Everitt he said, "promise me that you'll leave that Dai sword alone until I see you again."

"I'll make no such idiotic promise," snickered Everitt. His manner was the sort that Thunstone was apt to resent, even violently. But the big man said no more, not even a farewell. He followed the straw-tinted stranger out and down to the street. It was a fine night, without a moon.

"I suggest that you tell me enough to help me save Everitt," ventured Thunstone after a little silence. But the straw-tinted man shook his head slowly.

"I dare not," he almost moaned. "I'm in a sad enough situation as it is."

"Have the Dais been after you?"

"I know of no Dais in this hemisphere."

"That doesn't answer my question," insisted Thunstone. "Have they been after you? . . . You don't answer, which means that they have."

"I do not deny it," said the straw-tinted man. "Once among the Dais, you are forever touched with something of their influence, even from a great distance. You,

sir, have been considerate of me, and I would rather not afflict you with—with what afflicts me."

"You are not a Dai?" Thunstone prompted.

"Once I might have become one. I sought out their scholars and teachers, went a little way into their lore. Why not? An American has become a lama in Tibet, which is harder by far to do. Anyway, I progressed far enough to have the sword. I had won the right to possess it, but not the right to relinquish it. That truth I realized tonight—the thought came into my heart, it was put there from somewhere far off. Now I feel doom growing near and dense around me."

He shuddered, and Thunstone steadied him with a massive hand on his shoulder.

"Come home with me," bade Thunstone.

AT THUNSTONE'S hotel, there were books to study, as usual. One was a translation by Gaster of that manscript *Sword of Moses* which is believed by many to date from earlier than the fourth century and which has been called by Oxford scholars a connecting link between old Grecian mysteries and the magical works of the Middle Ages.

"Know that the man who wishes to use the sword must free himself for three days from accidental polution," read Thunstone, "and from every unclean thing . . ."

Like the ceremony of knighthood, he mused as he read, wherein the aspiring youth must fast, bathe, pray and keep vigil before being vouchsafed the weapon which would be his badge of gentility and prowess. Were not the swords of heroes rated in the old stories as having special power and personality, even bearing names like living beings—Gram, Durandal, Excalibur? Thunstone gazed at his silent guest, wondering what sort of initiation he had undergone. Undoubtedly none that Everitt would endure.

Thunstone took a second volume, the *Key of Solomon*, as translated by "H. G. on April 8, 1572." It was a sizeable work divided into ten parts, and plainly had been well thumbed before Thunstone had gained possession of it. Especially worn were the pages of the last section, entitled *"Of experiments extraordinary that be forbidden of good men.*

Thunstone found references to swords from almost the first pages, and there was a sub-section *of swords and knives.*

> It is necessary in operation of artes to have swords and knives and other instruments of which circles may be made and other necessary operations. . . . If swords be necessary, let them be scoured and clean from the first hour. . . .

There followed diagrams to show the "form and fashion" of such instruments. Two of the many outlines, entitled *cuttellus niger* and *cuttellus albus*, were reminiscent of the curved, double-edged Dai blade. There was mention also of other magical weapons, including lance, scimitar, sickle, dagger, poignard, and a knife called Andamco. Thunstone reached for a third book.

This, a massy tome bound in red cloth, was a beautifully printed English work, by a man whom Thunstone had often opposed and once or twice damaged. Here and there little gatherings and cults use it as a veritable bible, taking to heart its startling teachings and going through the forms of its rather pompous rituals. It is a slipshod work, containing some passages of startling beauty as well as masses of carelessly written and wordy nonsense. On the next to the last page Thunstone found what he was looking for:

> . . . Let the scholar take steel, smelted according to the previous formula, and by his understanding skill beat, grind and sharpen it into a sword. Let it be engraved with the words and symbols ordained, and employed in the performance of mystries. Let none touch, save those deserving . . .

Thunstone slammed shut the book and put it away.

"So," he said aloud, "you made the weapon yourself?"

"I did," replied the straw-tinted man, with an air of tragic resignation.

"Each Dai makes his own? Even to the Dai jewel on the pommel?"

"That is given us." The desperate eyes of strange color sought Thunstone. "Do you think I sold because I needed money? No—only to rid myself of the sword and all memory of the Dais. But they know,

far off in their own country, and send me their thoughts." The eyes closed. "I hear them now. They say to return to Everitt and demand the sword—tomorrow."

"Then we did wrong to leave him tonight," said Thunstone at once, and got quickly to his feet. "Go back to him now—wait, we both go back."

He put on his hat, and from a corner took a rather heavy walking stick of Malacca, with a silver band around its balance. "This was a gift from an old friend of mine, a Judge Pursuivant," he explained. "I'm ready to go if you are."

THIS time there was no response to their ringing at Everitt's door. Thunstone pushed at the panel with the ferrule of his stick, and it creaked inward on its hinges. They walked in.

The lights were on, and showed them Everitt, lying in his crumpled robe against the wall beneath the square of cloth on which the Dai sword had hung. Quickly Thunstone strode to his side and knelt. Everitt did not move when Thunstone touched him. He was dead, with his throat slit neatly as if by a razor-sharp edge.

Clutched in Everitt's unbandaged hand was the sword, snugly set in its sheath. The stone at the pommel gleamed red and baleful as fire in mist.

"A third time he tried to sheathe it unblooded," the straw-tinted man was babbling. "The third time, as in so many cases, was the finality-time. It turned in his hand and killed him."

Thunstone put a hand toward the weapon, but the straw-tinted man was before him, snatching at the hilt. Everitt's dead hand remained closed on the sheath, and the sword came clear as the straw-tinted man pulled at it. Its blade gleamed silver-white and spotless.

"No blood on it," said Thunstone.

"Because it drinks the blood in, as sand drinks water. Only the stone shows what has happened," and a pale-tan finger tapped the pommel. "Now, how to sheathe it once more?"

The strangely colored eyes gazed calculatingly at Thunstone, who straightened his bulk and, standing erect, gazed back.

"I can explain to the police," he said. "At least, there are certain high officials of the police who are ready to accept any explanation I care to make about anything. But that thing you hold must be disposed of quickly. I suggest that we drive into the country and bury it deeply in some field or woods." Stooping, he pulled the sheath from Everitt's inert fingers. "How shall we put it back into this?"

"It will not go in without bloodshed," the straw-tinted man said, weighing the curved sword with practised grip. "The thing has a spirit of its own. It is like the *Yan*—the devil—they say lives in that sword owned by the Fire-King. Probably you never heard of it."

"I've heard," Thunstone assured him. He held his stick horizontally across his body, right hand at the knob, left hand lightly holding it near the ferrule. "Frazer refers to it in *The Golden Bough*. Isn't that the sword owned by a ruler in the Cambodian jungle, of which it is claimed that if it is drawn the world will come to an end?"

"It may not be so powerful, but it has power, from the blood it has drunk," said the straw-tinted man. "This, too, must drink blood. Mr. Thunstone, I regret what I must do. Perhaps I need only make a slight wound, if you do not resist."

Thunstone cleared his throat harshly. "I give no blood to that thing. It has had victory enough, over you and over poor Everitt."

"You are unarmed, you cannot refuse." By a slight alteration of the position of his wrist, the straw-tinted man brought the point into line with Thunstone's broad chest. He sidled gingerly in.

Thunstone twisted the stick in his hands. The lower part seemed to slip away, baring a slim straight blade, bright as the Dai sword. He dropped both the hollow loose part and the sheath he had taken from Everitt.

"I expected something like that," smiled the straw-tinted man. "Of course, neither of us are being personal about this. Your sword cane cannot help you. This is a sword of power. It must be wetted with blood."

"Come on," invited Thunstone, his great body easily assuming the attitude of a fencer.

The curved blade swept fiercely at him,

clanged against his own interposed strip of metal, and bounded back like a ball from a shutter. The straw-tinted man exclaimed, as though an electric shock had run up his arm. He fell back, reassumed position and lunged again, this time with the point.

A single movement of Thunstone's lighter blade engaged and deflected the attack.

"I too have a sword of power," he said. "I had not time to warn you, but watch."

He feinted, coaxed his opponent into trying another slash. This he parried and, before the straw-tinted man could recover, darted in his own point. It struck solidly at the pommel of the Dai sword, projecting beyond the fist that held it. There was a sharp *ping,* and the red-flushed jewel bounced away across the floor like a thrown marble. Next instant Thunstone had dipped his blade under, engaged again, and with a quick press and slap had beaten the heavier weapon from the straw-tinted man's grasp.

A warning jab with the point made his disarmed opponent drop back. Then, "Watch," said Thunstone again, and pointed his own blade at the fallen Dai sword.

There was responsive movement in the thing, like the furtive retreating rustle of a frightened snake. As his point approached it, it shifted on the floor, moving on the planks with a little grating tinkle. For a moment it seemed to set its point hungrily toward the straw-tinted man, but Thunstone's weapon struck it smartly, and it faced away. Like a bit of conjuror's apparatus dragged by an invisible thread on the stage it moved, at first slowly and jerkily, then with more speed and smoothness. He herded it painstakingly toward the fallen leather sheath.

"How—how—" the straw-tinted man was stammering in absolute incomprehension.

Urged inexorably by a last touch of Thunstone's blade, the sword seemed fairly to scurry the last distance. It slid into the sheath with an abrupt *chock,* and lay quivering.

Thunstone picked it up and laid it carefully on a table.

"My blade is silver, a great specific against black magic," he now had time to say. "Look at the inscription. It's old, a little worn, but perhaps you can make out the Latin."

The pale straw-tinted face bent to read. *"Sic pereant omnes inimici tui,"* he repeated slowly. "My Latin is not as good as it might be."

"'So perish all thine enemies,'" translated Thunstone. "From the Song of Deborah, in the book of Judges. Pursuivant said that this silver sword was forged by St. Dunstan himself, and he was able to conquer no less an enemy than Satan. Pick up the Dai stone in your handkerchief. We can bury it along with the sword."

The straw-tinted man knelt to retrieve the jewel.

"It is dull again, as though all the blood had run out of it," he said, and rose, facing Thunstone hopefully. "And I have no sense of any more thought-commands from far away. Am I free? Why do you interest yourself in matters like these?"

"I sometimes wonder," replied John Thunstone, fitting his sword cane back together.

# Three in Chains

## BY SEABURY QUINN

THE murmur of voices sounded from the drawing room as I let myself in wearily after a hard afternoon at the hospital. An intern might appreciate two appendectomies and an accouchement within the space of four hours, but an intern would need the practice and be thirty years my junior. I was dog-tired and in no mood to entertain visitors. As silently as I could I crept down the hall, but:

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin hailed as I passed the partly opened door on tiptoe, *"à moi, s'il vous plait.* This is of interest, this." Putting the best face I could upon the matter I joined him.

"May I present Monsieur and Madame Jaquay?" he asked, then with a bow to the callers, *"Monsieur, Madame,* Dr. Trowbridge."

The young man who stepped forward with extended hand had fine, regular features crowned by a mass of dark hair, a broad, low forehead and deep greenish-hazel eyes set well apart beneath straight brows. The woman seated on the sofa was in every way his feminine counterpart. Close as a skullcap her short-cropped black hair, combed straight back from her forehead and waved in little ripples, lay against her small well-shaped head; her features were so small and regular as to seem almost insignificant by reason of their very symmetry. The dead-white pallor of her skin was enhanced by her lack of rouge and the brilliant lipstick on her mouth, while the greenness of her hazel eyes was rendered more noticeable by skillfully applied eye shadow which gave her lids a faintly violet-green tinge and a luster like that of worn silk.

I shook hands with the young man and bowed to the girl—she was little more—then looked at them again in wonder. "Mr. and Mrs. Jaquay?" I asked. "You look more like—"

"Of course, we do," the girl cut in. "We're twins."

"Twins—"

"Practically, sir. Our mothers were first cousins, and our fathers were first cousins, too, though not related to our mothers, except by marriage. We were born in the same hospital within less than half an hour of each other, and grew up in adjoining houses. We went to school, high school and college together, and were married the day after graduation."

"Is it not entirely charming?" Jules de Grandin demanded.

I was becoming somewhat nettled. Tired as I was I had no wish to interview two-headed calves, Siamese twins, cousins married to each other and like as grains of sand on the seashore or other natural phenomena. "Why, yes, of course," I agreed, "but—"

"But there is more—*parbleu,* much more! —my old and rare," the little Frenchman assured me. To the young man he ordered: "Tell him what you have told me, *mon jeune. Mordieu,* but you shall see his eyes pop like those of an astonished toad-frog!"

I dropped into a chair and tried my best to assume a look of polite interest as young Jaquay ran his hand over his sleek hair, cast a look of appeal at de Grandin and began hesitantly. "Georgine and I came here three months ago. Our Uncle, Yancy Molloy, made us sole beneficiaries of his will and Tofte House—perhaps you know the place?—was part of our inheritance. There were a few repairs to be made, though the place was in extraordinarily good condition for so old a structure, and we've been living there a little over two months. We've become very much attached to it; we'd hate to have to leave."

"Then why not stay?" I answered somewhat ungraciously. "If the house is yours and you like it—"

"Because it's haunted, sir."

"What!"

He colored slightly, but went on: "It's

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

*"—as if that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into some hellish drain-pipe."*

haunted. We didn't notice anything out of the ordinary for the first few days we lived there, then gradually both Georgine and I began to—well, sir, to feel alien presences there. We'd be reading in the library or sitting at table, or just going about our affairs in the house when suddenly we'd have that strange, uncanny feeling you have when someone stares fixedly at the back of your neck.

"When we'd turn suddenly as we always did at first, there'd be no one there, of course, but that odd, eerie sensation of being constantly and covetly watched persisted. Instead of wearing off it grew stronger and stronger till we could hardly bear it."

"U'm?" I commented, taking quick stock of our callers, noting their small stature, their delicacy of form and feature . . . their double cousinship amounted almost to inbreeding, fertile ground for neuroses to sprout in. "I know that feeling of malaise you refer to, and the fact that you both experienced it seems diagnostic. You young folks of today burn the candle at both ends. There's no need to hurry so; save a few sensations to be probed when you're past forty. These visual, sensory and circulatory symptoms aren't at all unusual. You'll have to take it easier, get much more rest and a lot more sleep. If you can't sleep I'll give you some trional—"

"But certainly," de Grandin cut in. "And the trional will surely stop the sound of clanking chains and dismal, hollow groans."

"What?" I turned on him. "Are you trying to tell me—"

"Not at all, by no means, my old one. But Monsieur Jaquay was endeavoring to do so when you interrupted with your prattle of the so odious trional. Say on, *Monsieur,*" he ordered our guest.

"We were getting pretty much on edge from this feeling of being watched so constantly," young Jaquay continued, "but it wasn't till last week we heard anything. We've made some pleasant friends in Harrisonville, sir, and been going out quite a bit. Last Saturday we'd been to New York on a party with Steve and Mollie Tenbroeck and Tom and Jennie Chaplin—dinner at the Wedgewood Room, to Broadway to see 'Up in Central Park,' then to Copacabana for supper and dancing. It must have been a little after three when we got home.

"GEORGINE had gone to bed, and I was in the bathroom washing my teeth when I heard her scream. I ran into the bedroom with the dentrifice suds still on my lips, and there she was, huddled in the bed with the covers drawn up to her chin, pushing against the headboard as if she were trying to force herself through it. 'Something touched me!' she chattered. 'It was like an ice-cold hand!'

"Well—" he smiled apologetically—"you know how it is, sir. 'What?' I asked.

" 'I don't know. I was almost asleep when it put its clammy fingers on me!'

"We'd had several rounds of cocktails at both dinner and supper, and Burgundy with dinner and champagne at supper, but both of us were cold sober—well, not more than pleasantly exhilarated—when we got home. 'You're nuts,' I told her.

"And just as I spoke something went wrong with the lights. They didn't go out all at once. That could have been explained by a blown-out fuse or a short circut in the feed line. This was different. The lamps began to grow dim slowly, as if a rheostat were being turned off. It was possibly a half-minute before the room was dark, but when the darkness came it was terrific. It pressed down on us like a great blanket, then it seemed to smother us completely—more completely than a thousand black cloths. You know that wild, unreasoning feeling of panic you have when you choke at table? This was like it. I was not only blinded, but bound and gagged as well. I tried to call to Georgine. The best that I could do was utter a choked, strangling gasp. I tried to go to her; it was like trying to wade waist-deep through a strong tide. The blackness in that room seemed liquefied, almost solidified.

"Then we heard it. At first it was no more than a whisper, like the sighing of a storm heard miles away, but getting louder, stronger, every second, like a storm that rushes toward you. Then the sigh changed to a moan and the moan became a howl, and the howl rose to a screech, and then rose to a piercing shriek that stabbed our eardrums like a needle. It rose and rose,

spiraling upward till it seemed no human throat could stand the strain of it. Then it stopped suddenly with a deep, guttural gurgle, as if all that dreadful geyser of sound were being sucked down into a drain-pipe. The silence that followed was almost worse than the noise. It was as if we had suddenly been stricken stone-deaf.

"I could feel the perspiration trickling down my forehead and into my eyes, but the sweat seemed turned to ice as the silence was smashed by the clanking of a chain. At first it was no more than a light clinking sound, as if some tethered beast stirred in the darkness. But like the shriek it increased in volume till it seemed some chained monster were straining at his iron leash, striving with a strength past anything that man or beast knows to break loose from its fetters."

Jaquay halted in his narrative to draw a handkerchief from his breast pocket and pass it over his brow. His wife was sobbing on the sofa, not violently, but with soft, sad little sounds, like those a frightened child might make.

"And then, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin prompted.

"Then the lights flashed on, not slowly, as they had gone off, but with a sudden blaze of blinding brightness, and there we were in our bedroom and everything was just the same. Georgine was cowering against the headboard of the bedstead, and I was standing at the bathroom door blinking like a fool in the sharp, dazzling light, with the dentifrice suds still on my lips and running down my chin to dribble on the floor."

"And there have been more—manifestations?"

GEORGINE JAQUAY answered in her charmingly modulated contralto. "Not so—so violent, sir. George and I were pretty badly shaken by what happened Saturday night, or more precisely Sunday morning, but we were both very tired and dropped off to sleep before we realized it. Next day was bright and sunny and we'd almost succeeded in convincing ourselves the experience of the night before was nothing but a sort of double nightmare when that sensation of being watched became stronger than ever. Only now it seemed somehow different."

"*Hein?*"

"Yes, sir. As if whoever—or whatever—watched us were gloating. Our uneasiness increased as the afternoon wore on; by bedtime we were in a pretty sorry state, but—"

"Ah, but you had the hardihood, the courage, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?* You did not let it drive you from your home?"

"We did not," Georgine Jaquay's small mouth snapped shut like a miniature steel trap on the denial. "We hadn't any idea what it was that wanted to get rid of us, but we determined to face up to it."

"*Bravissimo!* And then?"

"I don't know how long we'd been sleeping. Perhaps an hour; perhaps only a few minutes, but suddenly I wakened and sat bolt-upright, completely conscious. I had a feeling of sharp apprehension, as if an invisible alarm-bell were sounding a warning in my brain. There was no moon, but a little light came through the bedroom windows, enough for me to distinguish the furniture. Everything seemed as usual, then all at once I noticed the door. It showed against the further wall in a dark oblong. Dark. Dark like a hole. Somehow the comparison made me breathe faster. I could feel the pulses racing in my wrists and throat. The door had been shut—and locked—when we went to bed. Now it swung open, and I had a feeling unseen eyes were staring at me from the hallway while mine sought helplessly to pierce the darkness. Then I heard it. Not loud this time, but a sort of whimpering little moan, such as a sick child might give, and then the feeble clanking of a chain, as if whatever were bound by it moved a little, but not much.

"I sat there staring helplessly into the dark while every nerve in my body seemed tauted to the breaking point, and listened to that hopeless moaning and the gentle clanking of that chain for what seemed like an hour. Then, very softly, came a woman's voice."

"A woman's, *Madame?*"

"Yes, sir. I could not possibly have been mistaken. It was low, not a whisper, but very weak and—hopeless."

"Yes, *Madame?* And what did this so small voice say, if you please?"

" 'My poor darling!' "

"*Sang du diable!* It said that?"

"Yes, sir. Just that. No more."

"And were there further voices?"

"No, sir. There were a few weak, feeble moans, repeated at longer and longer intervals, and every once in a while the chain would rattle, but there were no more words."

DE GRANDIN turned to young Jaquay. "And did you hear this so strange voice also, *Monsieur?*"

"No, sir. I slept through it all, but later in the night, perhaps just before morning, I wakened with a feeling someone stood beside the bed and watched me, and then I heard the scraping of a chain—not across our floor, but over something hard and gritty, like stone or perhaps concrete, and three people moaning softly."

"Three? *Grand Dieu des cochons,* the man says three! How could you tell, *Monsieur?*"

"Their voices were distinct and different. One was a man's, a light baritone, well-pitched, but very weak. The other two were women's, one soft and husky, like stroked velvet, a Negro woman's, I'm sure, and the other was lighter in tone, musical, but very feeble, like that of a person sinking in a swoon."

"They did not speak?"

"Not in words, sir, but from their tones I knew all three were very weak and exhausted, so far gone that it seemed nothing mattered to them."

"U'm?" de Grandin took his little pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "And what did you do next, *Monsieur?*"

Jaquay looked embarrassed. "We sent for Dr. Van Artsdalen, sir."

"Ah? And who is he, if one may inquire?"

"He's pastor of the Union Church at Harbordale, sir. We told him everything that had happened, and he agreed to exorcise the house."

"*Mordieu,* did you, indeed?" de Grandin twisted the waxed ends of his small blond mustache until they were as sharp as twin needles. "And did he succeed in his mission?"

"I'm afraid he didn't, sir. He read a portion of the Scriptures from St. Luke, where it says that power was given the Disciples to cast out devils, and offered up a prayer, but —we haven't had a moment's peace since, sir."

The little Frenchman nodded. "One understands all too well, *Monsieur.* The occultism, he is neither good nor safe for amateurs to dabble in. This Doctor—the gentleman with the so funny name—may be an excellent preacher, but I fear he was out of his element when he undertook to rid your premises of unwelcome tenants. Who, by example, told him they were devils he came out to drive away?"

"Why—er—" Jaquay's face reddened—"I don't think anybody did, sir. We told him only what we had experienced, and he assured us that evil is always subject to good, and could not stand against the power of—"

"One understands completely," de Grandin cut in sharply. "The reverend gentleman is also doubtless one of those who believe savage animals cannot stand the gaze of the human eye, that sharks must turn upon their back to bite, and that you are immune from lightning-stroke if you have rubber heels upon your shoes. In fine, one gathers he is one of those who is not ignorant because of what he does not know, but because of the things he knows which are not true. What has occurred since his visit?"

"All day we feel those unseen eyes fairly boring into us; at night the sighs and groans and chain-clankings begin almost as soon as darkness comes and keeps up till sunrise. Frankly, sir, we're afraid to stay in the place after sunset."

The Frenchman nodded approval. "I think that you are wise to absent yourselves, *Monsieur.* For you to stay in that house after dark would not be courageous, it would be the valor of ignorance, and that, *parbleu,* is not so good. No, not at all.

"Attend me, if you please: I have made a study of such matters. To 'cast out devils,' may be an act of Christian faith which anyone possessing virtue may perform. Me, I do not know. But I do know from long experience that what will be effective in one case will wholly fail in another. Do you know surely what it is that haunts this

house from which you have so wisely fled? Did the good *pasteur* know? Do I know? *Non, pardieu,* we grope in ignorance, all of us! We know not what it is we have to contend with. Attend me, *Monsieur,* if you please, with great carefulness. As that very learned writer, Manly Wade Wellman, has observed, there are many sorts of disembodied beings.

*'In earth and sky and sea*
*Strange things there be.'*

"There are, by example, certain things called elementals. These never were in human form; they have existed from the beginning, and, I assure you, they are very naughty. They are definitely unfriendly to humankind; they are mischievous, they are wicked. They should be given as wide a berth as possible. It is safer to walk unarmed through a jungle infested with blood-hungry tigers than to frequent spots where they are known to be, unless you are well-armed with occult weapons, and even then your chances are no better than those of the hunter who goes out to trail the strong and savage beast.

"Then there are those things we call ghosts. They cannot be defined with nicety, but as a class they are the immortal, or at least the surviving spiritual part of that which was once man or woman. These may be either good, indifferent or bad. The bad, of course, far outnumber the good, for the great bulk of humanity that has died has not been good. *Alors,* it behooves us to step carefully when we have dealings with them. You comprehend?

"*Bien.* It may well be the good *pasteur* used the wrong technique when he assumed to rid you of your so unwelcome cotenants. He did not surely know his adversary; it is entirely possible that he succeeded only in annoying him as one might irritate but not cripple a lion by shooting him with a light rifle. *Mais oui,* it may be so. Let us now proceed with system. Let us make a reconnaissance, spy out the land, acquaint ourselves with that with which we must match forces.

"When this is done we shall proceed to business, not before. No, certainly; by no means."

"Tell me, Friend Trowbridge," he asked at breakfast next morning, "what do you know of this house from which Monsieur and Madame Jaquay have been driven?"

"Not much, I'm afraid," I answered. "I know it's more than a hundred years old and was built by Jacob Tofte whose family settled in New Jersey shortly after the Dutch wrested it from the Swedes in 1655."

"U'm? It is the original structure?"

"As far as I know. They built for permanence, those old Dutchmen. I've never been inside it, but I'm told its stone walls are two feet think."

"You do not know the year in which it was erected?"

"About 1800, I believe. It must have been before 1804, for there were originally slave quarters on the back lot, and slavery was abolished in New Jersey in that year."

"*Morbleu, pas possible!*"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing of the consequence, my friend. I did but entertain an idle thought. Those ghostly sighs and groans, those ghostly clankings of the chains, might not they have some connection with slavery?"

"None that I can see."

"And none, *hèlas,* that leaps to my eye, either," he admitted with a smile as he rose. "I did but toy with the suggestion." He lit a cigarette and turned toward the wall. "Expect me when I return, *mon vieux.* I have much ground to cover, and may be late for dinner—may *le bon Dieu* grant otherwise."

The evening meal was long since over when he returned, but that his day's work had not been fruitless I knew by the twinkle in his little round blue eyes, and his first words confirmed my diagnosis. "My friend, I would not go so far as to say I have found the key to this mystery, but I damnation think that I can say under which doormat the key hides."

I motioned toward the decanter and cigars, a work of supererogation, for he was already pouring himself a generous drink of brandy. "*Bien oui,*" he nodded solemnly as he shot the soda hissing into his glass. "All morning I did search, and nowhere could I find a person who knew much about that execrable Tofte House

until I reached the County Historical Society's archives. There I found more than ample reward for my labors. There were old deeds, old, yellowed newspapers; even the diaries of old inhabitants. Yes.

"This Jacob Tofte, he who built that house, must have been the devil of a fellow. In youth he followed the sea—*eh bien,* who shall say how far he followed it, or into what dark paths it led him? Those were the days of sailing ships, my old and rare, a man set forth upon a voyage newmarried and easily might find himself the father of a five-year-old when he returned. But not our friend old Jacob. Not he! He traveled many times to Europe, more than once to China and the Indies, and finally to Africa. There he found his true vocation. Yes."

He paused, eyes gleaming, and it would have been cruel to have withheld the question he so obviously expected. "Did he become a 'blackbirder,' a slaver?" I asked.

"*Parbleu,* my friend, you have put your finger on the pulse," he nodded. "A slave trader he became, *vraiment,* and probably a very good one, which means he must have been a very bad man, cruel and ruthless, utterly heartless. *Tiens,* the wicked old one prospered, as the wicked have a way of doing in this far from perfect world. When he was somewhere between forty-five and fifty years of age he returned to New Jersey very well supplied with money, retired from his gruesome trade and became a solid citizen of the community. Anon he built himself a house as solid as himself and married.

"Now here—" he leveled a slim forefinger at me like a pointed weapon—"occurs that which affords me the small inkling of a clue. The girl he married was his cousin, Marise Tenbrocken. She was but half his age and had been affianced to her cousin Merthou Van Brundt, a young man of her own age and the cousin, rather more distantly, of Monsieur Jacob. One cannot say with certainty if she broke her engagement willingly or at parental insistence. One knows only that Monsieur Jacob was wealthy while young Monsieur Merthou was very poor and had his way to make in the world. Such things happened in the old days as in the present, my friend."

HE PAUSED a moment, took a sip of brandy and soda, and lighted a cigar. "Of these things I am sure," he recommenced at length. "From there on one finds only scattered bones and it is hard to reconstruct the skeleton, much more so to hang flesh upon the frame. Divorce was not as common in those days as now, nor did people wash domestic soiled linen in public. We cannot surely know if this marriage of May and October was a happy union. At any rate the old *Monsieur* seems to have found domestic life a trifle dull after so many years of adventure, so in 1803 we find him fitting out a small schooner to go to New Orleans. *Madame* his wife remained at home. So did her *ci-devant fiancé,* who had found employment, if not consolation, in the offices of Peter Tandy, a ship chandler.

"Again I have but surmise to guide me. Did the almost-whitened embers of old love spring into ardent flame once more when Monsieur Van Brundt and Madame Tofte found themselves free from the surveillance of the lady's husband, or had they carried on a *liaison* beneath old Monsieur Jacob's nose? One wonders.

"*En tout cas,* Monsieur Jacob returned all unexpectedly from his projected voyage to New Orleans, dropping anchor in the Bay but three weeks after he had left. With Monsieur Tofte's arrival we find Madame Marise and her cousin, formerly her *fiancé,* and doubtless now her lover, vanishing completely. *Pouf!* Like that."

"And what became of them?" I asked as he remained silent.

"*Qui drait?* The devil knows, not I. They disappeared, they vanished, they evaporated; they were lost to view. With them perhaps went one Celeste, a Martinique mulatress Monsieur Jacob had bought—or perhaps stolen—to be Madame Marise's waiting maid.

"Her disappearance seemed to cause him more concern than that of *Madame* his wife and his young cousin Merthou, for he advertised for her by handbill, offering a reward of fifty dollars for her return. She was, it seems, a valuable property, speaking French, Spanish and English, understanding needlework and cooking and the niceties of the toilette. One would think he

would have offered more for her, but probably he was a very thrifty man. At any rate, it does not appear she was ever apprehended."

"And what became of Jacob Tofte?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "He sleeps, one hopes peacefully, in the churchyard of St. Chrysostom's. There was a family mausoleum on his land, but when he died in 1835 he left directions for his burial in St. Chrysostom's, and devised five thousand dollars to the parish. *Tiens,* he was a puzzle, that one. His very tombstone presents an enigma."

"How's that?"

"I viewed it in the churchyard today. Besides his name and vital data it bears this bit of doggerel:

*'Beneath this stone lies J. Tofte,*
*The last of five fine brothers.*
*He died more happy by his lone*
*And sleeps more sound than others.'*

"What do you make from that, *hein?"*

"Humph. Except that it's more generous in its substitution of adjectives for adverbs than most epitaphs, I'd say it compares favorably with the general level of graveyard poetry."

"Perhaps," he agreed doubtfully, "but me, I am puzzled. 'He died more happy,' says the epitaph. More happy than whom? And than whom does he sleep more soundly? Who are these mysterious others he refers to?"

"I can't imagine. Can you?"

"I—think—" he answered, speaking slowly, eyes narrowed, "I—think—I—can, my friend.

"I have searched the title to that property, beginning with Monsieur Jacob's tenancy. It has changed hands a surprising number of times. Monsieur Molloy, from whom Monsieur and Madame Jaquay inherited, was the fiftieth owner of the house. He acquired it in 1930 at an absurdly small price, and went to much expense to modernize it, yet lived in it less than a year. There followed a succession of lessees, none of whom remained long in possession. For the past ten years the place was vacant. Does light begin to percolate?"

I shook my head and he smiled rather bleakly. "I feared as much. No matter. Tomorrow is another day, and perhaps we shall be all wiser then."

"YOU have no office hours today, *n'est-ce-pas?"* he asked me shortly after breakfast the next morning.

"No, this is my Sabbatical," I answered. "One or two routine calls, and then—"

"Then you can come to Tofte House with us," he interrupted with a smile. "I damn think we shall see some things there today."

George and Georgine Jaquay were waiting for us at the Berkeley-York where they had taken temporary residence, and once more I was struck by their amazing likeness to each other. George wore gray flannels and a black Homburg, a shirt of white broadcloth and a pearl-gray cravat; Georgine wore a small black hat, a gray flannel manishly-cut suit with a white blouse and a little mauve tie at her throat. They were almost exactly of a size, and their faces similar as two coins stamped from the same die. The wonder of it was, I thought, that they required words to communicate with each other.

The gentleman with them I took to be their lawyer. He was about fifty, carefully if somberly dressed in a formally-cut dark suit with white edging marking the V of his waistcoat. His tortoise-shell glasses were attached to a black ribbon and in one gray-gloved hand he held a black derby and a black malacca cane.

"This is Monsieur Peteros, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin introduced when we had exchanged greetings with the Jaquays. "He is a very eminent medium who has kindly agreed to assist us."

Despite myself I raised my brows. The man might have been an attorney, a banker or mill-owner. Certainly he was the last one I should have picked as a practitioner of the rather malodorous profession of spiritualistic medium. Perhaps my face showed more than I realized, for Mr. Peteros' thin lips compressed more tightly and he acknowledged the introduction with a frigid "How d'ye do?"

But if the atmosphere were chilly de Grandin seemed entirely unaware of it. "Come, *mes amis,"* he bade, "we are assem-

bled and the time for action has arrived. Let us go all soon and not delay one little minute. No, certainly not."

FRAMED by birch and oak, elm and maple, the big old house in Andover Road looked out upon a stretch of well-kept lawn. It was built of native bluestone without porches, and stood foursquare to the highway. Its walls were at least two feet thick, its windows high and narrow, its great front door a slab of massive oak. The sort of house a man who had been in the slave trade might have put up, a veritable fortress, capable of withstanding attacks with anything less than artillery.

Jaquay produced his key and fitted it into the incongruously modern lock of the old door, swung back the white-enameled panels and stood aside for us to enter. Mr. Peteros went first with me close at his elbow, and as I stepped across the sill I all but collided with him. He had come to an abrupt halt, his head thrown back, nostrils quivering like those of an apprehensive animal. There was a nervous tic in his left cheek, the corners of his mouth were twitching. "Don't you sense it?" he asked in a voice that grated grittily in his throat.

Involuntarily I inhaled deeply. "No," I replied shortly. The only thing I "sensed" was the Charbert perfume Georgine Jaquay used so lavishly. I had no very high opinion of mediums. If Peteros thought he could set the stage to put us in a mood for any "revelations" he might later make, he'd have to try something more subtle.

We stood in a wide, long hall, evidently stretching to the rear of the house, stone-floored and walled with rough-cast plaster. The ceiling was of beamed oak and its great timbers seemed to have been hand-squared. The furniture was rather sparse, being for the most part heavy maple, oak or hickory —benches, tables and a few rush-bottomed square-framed chairs, and though it had small beauty it had value, for the newest piece there must have been at least a hundred years old. A fireplace stretched a full eight feet across the wall to the right, and on the bluestone slab that served for mantel were ranged pewter plates and tankards and a piece or two of old Dutch delft any one of which would have fetched its weight in gold from a knowing antique dealer. To our left a narrow stairway with a handrail of wrought brass and iron curved upward.

I was about to remark on the patent antiquity of the place when de Grandin's sharp command forestalled me: "It was in the bedroom you had your so strange experiences, my friends. Let us go there to see if Monsieur Peteros can pick up any influences."

Young Jaquay led the way, and we trooped up the narrow stairway single file, but halfway up I paused and grasped the balustrade. I had gone suddenly dizzy and felt chilled to the bone, yet it was not an ordinary chill. Rather, it seemed a sudden coldness started at my fingertips and shivered up into my shoulders, then, as with a cramp induced by a galvanic battery, every nerve in my body began to tingle and contract.

Just behind me, Peteros grasped my elbow, steadying me. "Swallow," he commanded in a sharp whisper. "Swallow hard and take a deep breath." As I obeyed the tingling feeling of paralysis left me and I heard him chuckle softly. "I see you felt it, too," he murmured. "Probably you felt it worse than I did; you weren't prepared for it." I nodded, feeling rather foolish.

Apparently the Jaquays had refurnished the bedroom, for it had none of the gloomy eighteenth century air of the rest of the house. The bedstead was a canopied four-poster, either Adam or a good reproduction, a tall chest of mahogany stood against one wall, between the narrow, high-set windows was a draped dressing table in the long mirror of which were reflected silver toilet articles and crystal bottles. Curtains of fluted organdie, dainty and crisp, hung at the windows. The floor was covered with an Abusson carpet.

*"Bien."* De Grandin took command as we entered the chamber. "Will you sit there, *Madame?"* he indicated a chintz-covered chair for Georgine. "And you, Monsieur Jaquay, I would suggest you sit beside her. You may be under nervous strain. To have a loving hand to hold may prove of helpfulness. *Mais oui,* do not I know? I shall say yes. You, Friend Trowbridge, will sit here, if you please, and Monsieur Peteros will occupy this chair—" he indicated a

large armchair with high, tufted back. "Me, I prefer to stand. Is all in readiness?"

"I think we'd better close the curtains," Peteros replied. "I seem to get the emanations better in the dusk."

*"Bien. Mais certainement."* The little Frenchman drew the brocade over-draperies of the windows, leaving us in semi-darkness.

Mr. Peteros leant back and took a silver pencil from his waistcoat pocket. Holding it upright before his face, he fixed his eyes upon its tip. A minute passed, two minutes; three. From the hall below came the ponderous, pompous ticking of the great clock, small noises from the highway—the rumble of great cargo trucks, the yelp of motor horns—came to us through the closed and curtained windows. Peteros continued staring fixedly at the pencil point, and in the semi-darkness his face was indistinct as a blurred photograph. Then the upright pencil wavered from the perpendicular. Slowly, like a reversed pendulum, or the arm of a metronome, it swung in a short arc from right to left and back again. His eyes followed it, converging on each other until it seemed he made a silly grimace. The silver rod paused in its course, wavered like a tree caught in a sudden wind, and dropped with a soft thud to the carpet. The medium's head fell back against the cushions of his chair, his eyelids drooped and in a moment came the sound of measured breathing, only slightly stertorous, scarcely more noticeable than the ticking of the clock downstairs. I knit my brows and shook my head in annoyance. I could have simulated a more convincing trance. If he thought we could be imposed upon by such a palpable bit of trickery. . . .

"O-o-o-oh!" Georgine Jaquay exclaimed softly. She had raised one hand to her throat and the painted nails of her outspread fingers were like a collar of garnets on the white flesh.

I felt a sudden tenseness. Issuing from Peteros' lips was a thin column of smoke, as if he had inhaled deeply from a cigar. Yet it was not ordinary smoke. It had an oddly luminous quality, as if its particles were microscopic opals that glowed with their own inward fire, and instead of coming in a series of short puffs, as cigar smoke would have come from his mouth, it flowed in steady, even stream, like steam escaping from a simmering kettle. *"Regardez, s'il vous plait,* Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered half belligerently. "I tell you it is psychoplasm—soul stuff!"

THE cloud of luminescent vapor drifted slowly toward the ceiling, then as if wafted by an unfelt zephyr coiled and circled toward the wall pierced by the curtained windows, and slowly, more like dripping water than a cloud of steam or smoke, began to trickle down the wall until it covered it completely.

It is difficult to describe what happened next. Slowly in the opalescent vapor that obscured the wall there seemed to generate small sparks of bluish light, mere tiny points of phosphorescence, and gradually, but with a gathering speed, they multiplied until they floated like a swarm of dancing midgets circling round each other till they joined to form small nebulae of brightness large as gleaming cigarette ends. The nebulae became more numerous, touched each other, coalesced as readily as rain drops brought together, till they formed a barrier of eerie, intense bluish light.

There was eeriness, uncanniness about it, but it was not terrifying. Instead of fear I felt a sort of gentle melancholy. Vague, long-forgotten memories wafted through my mind . . . a girl's soft laugh, the touch of a warm hand, the echo of the muted whisper of a once-loved voice, the subtle fragrance of old hopes and aspirations.

Half dazzled, wholly mystified by the phenomenon, I watched the luminous curtain.

A sort of cloudiness appeared in its bright depths, at first no more than a dim, unformed network of small dots and dashes, but gradually they built up a pattern. As when an image appears on the copper of a halftone plate in its acid bath, a picture took form on the surface of the glowing curtain. As if through the proscenium of a theatre—or on a motion picture screen—we looked into another room.

I recognized it instantly, so did Georgine Jaquay, for I heard her gasp, "Why, it's the hall of this house!"

*"Taisez-vous!"* de Grandin snapped.

*"Laissez-moi tranquille, s'il vous plait, Madame!* Be silent!"

It was the hall we had come through less than ten minutes before, yet somehow it was not the same. A great fire blazed on the wrought-metal andirons and in a pair of brass candlesticks tallow dips were burning. The lights and shadows shifted constantly, but such illumination as there was seemed to do little more than stain the darkness. The door through which we had come opened and a middle-aged Negro dressed in a suit of coarse tow came into the apartment, bending almost double under the weight of a brass-bound trunk of sole leather. He paused uncertainly a moment, seemed to turn as if to hear some command shouted at him from outside, then shambled toward the stairway.

The door, which had swung partly shut, was kicked back violently, and across the sill a man stepped with a woman in his arms. He was a big man, tall and heavy-set, with enormous shoulders and great depth of chest, dressed in the fashion of a hundred years and more ago. His suit of heavy woolen stuff was snuff-colored, made with a long coat and breeches reaching to his knees, and his brown stockings were of knitted wool but little better than those of the Negro. I guessed his age as somewhere near fifty, for there were streaks of gray in the long hair that he wore plaited in a queue and in the short dark reddish beard and mustache that masked his lower face. He had a big nose, dark hawk-eyes, broad low forehead and high-jutting cheek-bones. His skin was darkly tanned, and though he had few wrinkles they were deep ones. He was, I thought, a well-to-do farmer, perhaps a merchant sea captain. Certainly he was no gentleman, and just as certainly he was a hard customer, tricky and unscrupulous in bargaining and fierce and ruthless in a fight.

Of the woman we could see little, for a long hooded cloak of dark blue linsey-woolsey covered her from head to heels. What was at once apparent, however, was that she did not snuggle in his arms. She neither held his shoulders nor put her arms about his neck, merely lay quiescent in his grasp as if she rested after an exhausting ordeal, or realized the futility of struggling.

But when he set her on her feet we saw that she was very delicately made, not tall but seeming taller than her actual height because of extreme slenderness. She was pretty, almost beautiful, with a soft cream-and-carnation skin, bronze hair that positively flamed in the firelight, and eyes of luminous greenish violet with the wondering expression of a hurt child.

The man said something to her and with a start I realized we witnessed a pantomime, a scene of vibrant life and action soundless as an old-time moving picture, but legible in meaning as sky-writing on a windless day. We saw her shake her small head in negation, then as he echoed his peremptory demand hold out her hands in a gesture of entreaty. Her face was bloodless and her eyes suffused with tears, but if she had been a bird and he a cat her appeal could not have been more futile. Abruptly he seized her left hand and raised it to a level with her eyes, and on its third finger we saw the great, heavy plain gold band that marked her as a matron. For a moment he stood thus, then flung the little hand from him as if it were a bit of dross and grasped the trembling girl in his arms, crushed her to him and bruised her shrinking lips with kisses that betrayed no trace of love but were afire with blazing passion.

When he released her she shrank back, cheeks aflame with outraged blood and eyes almost filmy with nausea, but as he repeated his command she crept rather than walked to the stairway and mounted it slowly, holding fast to the wrought-brass handrail for support.

THE man turned toward the kitchen, bellowing an order and into the hall stole another girl about the age of her whom he had just mauled so lustfully. She was a mulatress, scarce larger than a child, with delicately formed features, short wavy brown hair clustering round her ears and neck in tiny ringlets, and large dark eyes as gentle—and as frightened—as a gazelle's. Despite the almost shapeless gown of woolen stuff that hung on her we saw her figure was exquisite, with high breasts, narrow hips and lean, small waist. She bore a straw-wrapped stone demijohn stopped with a broken corncob, and at his order

took a pewter tankard from the mantel and poured some of the colorless contents of her jar into it. "More!" We could not hear the word, but it required no skill in lip-reading to know what he ordered, and with a shrug that was no more than a flutter of her shapely shoulders she splashed an added half-pint of liquor into the beaker.

It was obvious she was afraid of him, for she stayed as far away as she could, and her large eyes watched him furtively. When she had filled the mug she stood back quickly, pretending to be busy with recorking the bottle, but obviously eager to stay out of reach.

Her stratagem was futile, for when he downed the draft he wiped his mouth upon his cuff and held out his hand. "Kiss it!" we saw, rather than heard him order. She took his rough paw in her delicate gold hands and bent her sleek head over it, but he would not let her kiss its back. "Not that way!" he bade roughly, and obediently she turned it over and pressed her lips to its palm.

Why he demanded this peculiar form of homage I had no idea, but evidently de Grandin understood its implication, for I heard him mutter, *"Sale bête*—dirty beast!"

The bearded man threw back his head and laughed a laugh that must have filled the house with its bellow, then half playfully but wholly viciously he struck the girl across the face with a back-handed blow that sent her reeling to a fall beside the tiled hearth of the fireplace. The demijohn slipped from her hand, and in a moment a dark stain of moisture spread across the stones.

We saw him beckon her imperiously, saw her rise trembling to her feet and slink toward him, her wide eyes fearful, her lips trembling. Nearer she crept, shaking her head from side to side, begging mutely for mercy, and when she was within arm's length he seized her as a pouncing beast might grasp its prey. As a terrier might shake a rat he shook her, swaying her slim shoulders till her head bobbed giddily and her short curls waved like wind-whipped bunting round her ears. Protesting helplessly she opened her mouth and the force with which he shook her drove her teeth together on her tongue so that a little stream of blood came from the corners of her mouth. Then, not content with this punishment, he struck her with his fist, knocking her to the floor, then raising her again that he might strike her down once more. Three times he hit her with his knotted fist, and every blow drew blood. When he was done he left her in a little crumpled heap beside the hearthstone, her slim gold hands held to her face and bright blood dripping from her nose, her lips and her bruised cheeks.

*"Cochon, pourceau, sale chameau!"* de Grandin whispered venomously. *"Pardieu,* he was a species of a stinking swine, that one!"

The big man wiped his mouth upon his sleeve once more and, swaying slightly from the effect of the potent apple-jack, made for the stairway up which the girl he had borne into the house had crept.

THE picture before us began to fade, not growing dimmer but apparently dissolving like a cloud of steam before a current of air, and in a moment little dots and lines of color danced and moved across the luminous screen, forming figures like the prisms of a kaleidoscope, then gradually merging to depict another scene.

Not very different from its present aspect, save that its lawn was not so well kept, the front yard of the house spread before us. It was early evening, and from the marshes—long since filled in and built over—rose a soft, light mist, silvery, unearthly, utterly still. The trees that rimmed the highway were almost denuded of their foliage and stood out in sharp silhouette, pointing to the pale sky from which most of the stars had been wiped by a half-moon's light. An earlier wind had blown the fallen leaves across the bricked walk with its low box borders, and the man and woman walking away from us kicked them from their path, rustling them against their feet as children love to do in autumn. At the lower end of the footway they paused and as the girl turned her face up to her escort we recognized the young woman we had seen borne into the house. The moonlight brought them into clear-cut definition. The man was young, about the girl's age, and bore a strong resemblance to her, obviously a family likeness. His clothes and

linen were threadbare but scrupulously clean, and his lean drawn face showed the effect of high ambition and slender resources. What they said we had no way of knowing, but we saw her arms creep up around his neck, not passionately, but tenderly, like the tendrils of a vine, as she raised her lips for his kiss. A moment they stood thus in silent embrace, then she unclasped her arms from his neck and he turned away, walking down the moonlit highroad with no backward glance and with squared shoulders, like a man who has made final, immutable decision.

ONCE more the scene was obscured, then took on new form, and we saw the white girl and the mulatress working feverishly packing a small nail-studded trunk. They folded linen underwear and sprinkled it with crumbled dry lavender, pressed a woolen dress down on the antique lingerie, added several pairs of cotton stockings and a pair of square-toed little buckled shoes. The box was packed and strapped, the girl ran to the door, but paused upon the threshold, the joy wiped from her face as sunlight disappears before a sudden cloud.

In the entrance stood the bearded man, and over one shoulder, as a butcher might have held a new-slaughtered calf, he bore the body of the young man we had seen before. Blood trickling from a scalp-wound told us how the boy had been bludgeoned, and on the barrel of the antique horse-pistol in the big man's right hand there was a smear of blood to which a few brown hairs adhered.

There was something utterly appalling in the big man's quietness. Methodically as if he followed a rehearsed plan he dropped the unconscious man on the bed, retraced his steps to the door and returned with three short lengths of iron chain which he proceeded to fasten round the necks of the two women and the swooning man.

Amazingly the women made no effort to resist but stood as dumbly and quiescently as well-trained horses waiting to be harnessed as he latched the fetters on their throats. Perhaps the memory of past beatings told them that submissiveness was wiser, perhaps they realized the hopelessness of entreaty or effort. It was very quickly accomplished, and in a moment the big man had shouldered the unconscious youth again, tucked the little trunk beneath his free arm, and nodded toward the door. Without a word of protest or entreaty the women went before him, holding the free ends of their neck chains in their hands as if to still their clinking.

WE LOOKED into a little room, perhaps some twelve feet square, stone-floored, stone-walled, stone-ceilinged. It was darker than a moonless midnight, but somehow we could distinguish objects. About the walls were small partitioned spaces rising four deep, tier on tier, like oversized pigeonholes, and each was closed with a stone slab in which a heavy ring-bolt had been set. Something like a swarm of small red ants seemed crawling up the backs of my knees and my spine. One did not need to be an antiquarian to recognize the crypts of an old family tomb.

Something stirred in the darkness, and as I strained my eyes toward it I saw the huddled form of a woman. I knew it for a woman by the long red hair that hung upon its head, but otherwise, although it had been stripped of clothing, it was almost unclassifiable. Emaciation was so far advanced that she was little more than a mummy. Knee- and elbow-joints stood out against the staring skin like apples on broomsticks, the hip-bones showed like ploughshares each side the pelvis, the ribs were like the bars of a grating, and every tooth was outlined through the shrunken lips.

The creature bent its skull-face to the stone pavement and licked a little moisture from the trickle of a tiny spring-fed rivulet that crossed the flags, then tried to rouse itself to a sitting posture, tried vainly again, and sank back limply. Slowly, painfully, as if it fought paralysis, it edged across the cold damp stones of the floor, stretched out a bony, tendon-scored hand toward another thing that crouched against the farther wall.

This was—or had been—a man, but now it was no better than a skeleton held in articulation by the skin stretched drum-tight over it. It seemed to rouse to semi-consciousness by the other's movement, and tried desperately to reach the withered hand

stretched toward it. In vain. The chains that tethered the whimpering woman-lich and her companion were barely long enough to stretch from their ring-bolts to the floor, leaving the captives just length of leash enough to lie on the floor, but not permitting them sufficient movement to reach each other, even when their arms were stretched to fullest extent.

And as we watched the prisoners struggle futilely to bring their dying hands together we saw something flutter feebly in the darkness at the rear of the tomb. Chained like the other two the golden-skinned mulatress lay against the wall, and constantly her head turned from side to side and her emaciated body shook with unremitting spasms.

"*Cordieu,* but it was monstrous, that!" de Grandin whispered grittily. "Not content with making them die horribly by slow starvation; not content with making it impossible for them so much as to join hands in their extremity, he chained that other poor one with them that they should be denied all privacy, even in the hour of death!"

He struck his hands together sharply. "*Monsieur!*" he called. "Monsieur Peteros!"

The gruesome scene before us faded as if it had been frescoed on wax melting in quick heat, and through the semi-darkness of the room there swirled a wraithlike cloud of gleaming vapor that hovered like a nimbus above the medium a moment, then, as if he had inhaled it, was absorbed by him. "Eh?" Peteros murmured sleepily. "Did I go into a trance? What did I say?"

"Not a word, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin told him. "You were as dumb as an infant oyster, but through your help we are much wiser. Yes. Certainly. Stay here and rest, for you must be exhausted. The rest of us have duties to perform. Come, *mes amis,*" he looked at me and the Jaquays in turn, "let us go to that abominable tomb, that never-to-be-quite-sufficiently-anathematized sepulchre. We are a century and more too late—we cannot rescue them, *hèlas,* but we can give them what they most desire. Of a surety."

WITH a crowbar we forced back the rust-bound iron door of the Tofte mausoleum and after standing back a moment for the outer air to enter de Grandin led the way into the tomb, playing the beam of his flashlight before him.

"*Voyez! Voilà que!*" he ordered as the shifting shaft of light stabbed through the murky darkness. Death lay at our feet. Arranged in orderly array as if they waited articulation by an osteologist were the bones of three skeletons. Dangling from the ring-bolts of three stone-sealed crypts to the floor beside the skulls were lengths of rust-bitten iron chain. The disintegration of the prisoners' upper spinal columns had loosed the loops of iron latched about their throats. We had no difficulty determining their sex. Even if the widely-opened sciatic notches of the pelvic bones and the smoothly curved angular fronto-nasal articulation of the skulls had not denoted the female skeletons to de Grandin's practiced eye and mine the pitiful relics lying by two of the skulls would have told their story—the amethyst-set gold earrings of the white girl and the patina-encrusted copper loops that once had hung in the mulatress' little ears.

The Frenchman stepped back, bowing as if he addressed three living people. "*Mes pauvres,*" he announced softly, "we are come to give you release from your earth-bound state. Your pleas have been heard; you shall be together in what remains of the flesh. The evil man who boasted of his better, sounder sleep—*parbleu,* but Jules de Grandin makes a monkey out of him!"

"It is a case for the coroner," he told us as we walked back to the house. "We need not tell the things that we saw in the bedroom. The circumstances of the disappearance of Madame Tofte and Monsieur Van Brundt as they appear in the historical records, together with the advertisement crafty old Monsieur Jacob broadcast for the return of the poor Celeste, will be sufficient to establish their identity. As to the manner of their death—*eh bien,* does it not proclaim itself? But certainly."

He smiled grimly. "And that old hypocrite who lies so snugly in St. Chrysostom's churchyard—though it is late in overtaking him his sin has found him out at last. The jury of the coroner cannot help but name him as the murderer of those poor ones."

THE dinner at the Berkeley-York had been a huge success. *Consommé de tortue vert* with sherry, *huîtres Francois* with Chablis, *truite Margery* with Meursault, *coq au vin* with Nuits St. Georges and finally *crêpes Sussettes* with cointreau. As the waiter poured the coffee and Chartreuse I fully expected to hear de Grandin purr. "I suppose it's your theory that the stone and timbers of Tofte House held a certain psychic quality derived from association with the tragedy of Marise Tofte and Merthou Van Brundt, or that these unhappy lovers in the stress of their emotion passed on lasting thought-emanations to their inanimate surroundings?" I asked him. "I've heard you say that dreams or visions can be evoked in psychically sensitive persons when they're permitted to sleep in a room with a chip from a house where some atrocious crime has been committed, or—"

"I would not quite say that," he interrupted with a smile as he took a morsel of pink peppermint between his teeth and sipped a little black coffee. "This, I think, is what we might call a genuine ghost story, one where the earthbound spirits of the dead, denied the rites of Christian burial, sought constantly for help from the living.

"Consider, if you please: That Madame Marise and Monsieur Merthou were about to elope, accompanied by the slave girl Celeste, we have no doubt at all. Also, after seeing what a *bête bas* she had for husband one cannot greatly blame her, especially as she was still in love with her cousin who seems to have been a quiet, amiable young man. Yes.

"Next, we know the naughty old Monsieur Jacob laid a trap for them. He pretended to go on a long voyage, gave them barely time to renew love and make plans for eloping then *pouf!* swooped down on them like a cat on two luckless mice. The sad rest we know also.

"When he had chained them like brute beasts they died all miserably in the tomb, and their poor, starved bodies lay unburied. What then? Year after painful year they sought to tell their plight to those who came to live in that old house, but always they did fail. Those whom they begged for help were frightened and ran off.

"But finally these unhappy cousins who were thwarted in their love were visited by cousins fate had given to each other. And so it came about that we, with Monsieur Peteros' assistance, found their pitiful remains, had their killer branded as a murderer, and after proper rites laid them in consecrated ground. Yes, certainly."

A grim expression settled on his lips. "That poor Celeste, the slave girl, she gave me some trouble," he confided.

"How's that?" asked Georgine Jaquay.

"The sexton of St. Chrysostom's told me the ground was reserved for the burial of white people exclusively. '*Monsieur,*' I say to him, 'this are no woman, but a skeleton I seek to have interred here, and the skeleton of a young girl of color is white as that of a Caucasian. Besides, if you persist in your pig-odious refusal I shall have to tweak your far from handsome nose.' *Tiens,* he let us bury her beside those whose death she had shared."

Georgine Jaquay gave a short neighing laugh, the sort of laugh a person gives to keep from weeping, but in a moment tears glinted on her lashes. "Do you suppose it was because they were cousins, and George and I are cousins, that they finally found peace through us?" she asked.

He raised his narrow shoulders in the sort of shrug no one but a Frenchman can achieve. "Who knows, *Madame?* It are entirely possible," he answered. Then with one of his quick elfin grins, "Or possibly it were because you and *Monsieur* your husband had the good sense to consult Jules de Grandin. He is a very clever fellow, that one."

# The Man in Purple

By
DOROTHY
QUICK

*Oh, yes, he was handsome, compelling—and utterly evil!*

Heading by
BORIS DOLGOV

IT WAS early morning when we arrived in Paris. Somehow in those pre-war days it always seemed to be between one and four in the morning when the train slid into the station, no matter how you planned. So, here were we, at 4 a. m., surrounded with luggage in a taxi, on our way to the Albion, the little hotel where Godfrey and I always stayed.

It was a charming hotel, quite unknown to the general public, found for us by some French friends. Godfrey and I were crazy

about it. This was the first time we'd come without reservations. Godfrey had no doubt they'd take us in, but I was not so sanguine. I didn't mind picking up things at a moment's notice and running off with Godfrey—he loved the excitement of doing the unexpected and I loved him—but I usually wired ahead for rooms wherever we were going. This time there literally had been no opportunity to do so and as the taxi drew up before the Albion and honked its horn with the pathos only a French cab can manage, I was worried.

It soon appeared that my forebodings were justified. The clerk, Raoul, whom we knew extremely well, was glad to see us, but not overjoyed as he ordinarily would have been. He was full of apologies and lamentations. "But there is nothing for Madame and Monsieur. Not a single room in the hotel. I am desolate, but it is so. If you had only wired ahead . . ."

I took the bull by the horns. "But, we did, Raoul! Do you mean you didn't get the telegram? We sent it two days ago."

Two days ago we had been in London without the slightest idea of Paris in our, or rather Godfrey's head. But I always believe if one is going to lie, it might as well be wholeheartedly.

Raoul wrung his hands. "Oh, Madame, I am devastated. But there is nothing . . ."

"But surely," Godfrey's calm English voice broke in, "you've got some corner you can tuck us in for the night. You can't turn us out at this hour! Then tomorrow you can fix us up."

A kind of struggle went on in Raoul's face. It was plain to see he was in an agony of indecision. Finally one side of his problem won. But it was obvious, with great reluctance on his part. "There is a suite, on the garden side, perhaps—just for tonight—or what is left of the night—"

"Splendid. And I assure you we won't mind the extra charge," added my practical husband.

Raoul turned to the combination key and letter rack behind him, extracted a key, and called to the bellboy, "Here Pierre. Take Monsieur and Madame to No. 217."

"217?" The boy, half awake, seemed incredulous.

"217," Raoul repeated with an emphasis that stopped whatever the boy had been going to say. Silently he picked up our bags and led the way to the elevator that had been installed in the well of the stairway—one of those open-cage affairs the French delight in, but which my American remembrance of what an elevator can be, dislikes intensely.

As we ascended Raoul called out, *"Dormez bien,"* and Pierre made a sound that up in the Bronx they call a cheer. Evidently he thought we wouldn't sleep well, and I wondered if he had labeled us as bride and groom. He was a new addition to the Albion. He didn't know we'd been coming there for over five years.

He threw open the door of No. 217, turned on the light, sidled the bags in, and was off so quickly that he missed the silver Godfrey had ready to give him. "Remarkable," I exclaimed. Then, as I took in the really charming room, added, "Godfrey, this is the real thing."

IT WAS. Boiserie of an elegance and charm that went with powdered hair, bright silks, and jeweled hands. The delicately carved wood was painted that soft shade of grayish blue which no modern materials can quite achieve. The room had probably been a card room in the time of Marie Antoinette. I could picture the gay scene that had been reflected in the lovely old mirror that was set into the wall above the fireplace. The furniture was gilt and covered in a salmon-pink damask. The whole effect was exquisite.

"This stuff must be worth a great deal," again my practical husband was speaking. "It's genuine—the whole room is a museum piece. Don't wonder they don't like to rent it. Let's look at the bedroom—" He threw open the door and switched on the light.

It was charming, too, but in an utterly different way. It was completely modern, ivory paint, a gay flowered wallpaper of pale yellow with red and blue flowers and a matching chintz for curtains, bedspreads, and slip covers. It sounds wild, but the effect was a sunshiny bower of roses. The furniture was ivory. It was all sweetness and light before I stepped over the threshold. The instant I was in the room, I felt differently. Despite the gayety and the wink-

ing brightness of a crystal chandelier, obviously converted from candles to electricity, I felt a sense of gloom. It was as though a mantle of depression had been flung over my spirit.

"It's a very gay room," my husband said.

"Gay *looking,*" I amended. Then I voiced my thoughts. "Don't you think it's odd Raoul held out on us. He was all ready to turn us away—with this up his sleeve."

"Faker! Probably so he can overcharge—"

Godfrey was most likely right. I was silly to go imagining things because of circumstances—the odd glance between Raoul and Pierre, and my own sudden depression. The latter wasn't due to the room. It could not be—it was my own fatigue catching up with me.

GODFREY lugged in the bags, grumbling against Pierre's laziness. I started to say, "Maybe the boy didn't want to come in here," but I caught the words back, and went about my preparations for bed. It was when I was in the bathroom cleaning my teeth that I heard the first knock!

I thought Pierre might have had a troubling conscience and come back. When it came again, I called out: "Why don't you go to the door, Godfrey?"

"Why?" his matter-of-fact voice came back.

"Knocking—"

"Didn't hear anything," but he went through to the living room and I heard him open the door. When he came back he was laughing. "Must be hearing things, old girl."

My twenty-two years always shrink away from Godfrey's "old girl," even though I know it's meant as a form of endearment.

"Didn't you hear anything?" I asked, when reluctantly I returned to the gay room.

"No." Godfrey was bland.

Just at that moment the knocking started again. From Godfrey's start I knew he heard it too. That was a relief! I didn't want to hear noises no one else did.

"People next door," Godfrey said.

"At this hour?"

"Paris is noted for the hours it keeps. They've probably been sampling champagne from *boite* to *boite,* and are now returning from making a night of it."

I wasn't up to arguing. I kissed Godfrey goodnight, and went over to my own twin bed, Godfrey already having made himself comfortable in the other. As I shed by negligée, he turned out the light. Presently I heard his even breathing. I counted his respirations to drown out the knocks which were coming more frequently now. They obviously didn't bother him, but they did things to me. The linen sheets were cold and clammy. So was I, but not because of them. I was afraid!

There was something strange about these rooms. Raoul wouldn't have held out on us without a good reason. He had obviously given them to us with great reluctance. I was beginning to understand why. The knocking was getting louder now. It seemed to be coming from everywhere—all around my head. If it were the people next door, they were bowling on the wall behind my bed. It was only because I was completely exhausted that I fell asleep. Or, was it sleep? One minute I was exasperated at the knocking and afraid of something, I didn't know what. The next minute the knocking ceased and I was afraid—afraid of the man in purple!

HE STOOD in the doorway, very tall, very elegant, with a purple moiré waistcoat lavishly embroidered in heavy gold thread. He wore it over a lavender vest, and he had on purple satin trousers that ended below his knee. A diamond buckle fastened them and they undoubtedly served as garters for his elegant purple hose. He wore black slippers with diamond buckles. There was a flash of the same stones on the vest and real lace cascaded down his front and from his sleeves. His hair was powdered, and his face was utterly evil. The Marquis de Sade must have looked like that about midway in his career, when the good looks nature had endowed him with were being superseded by the ideas and practices that were essentially his own.

The man in purple was handsome. I could see him plainly by the light coming through the transom. A truly elegant figure of a man, but his lips were sensuous and cruel, his eyes cold, yet compelling in some

strange, fascinating way. He looked toward me and I turned cold in my innermost veins. "If he speaks to me, I shall die," I thought.

But he didn't. His black malicious eyes held mine and he came nearer.

I couldn't move. If he'd been a snake charmer and I the snake, I couldn't have been more in his power, although the illustration was twisted, for it was he who resembled the snake, not I. Even his powdered wig didn't disguise the fact his head was shaped like an adder's head. He came up to the bed, close to me, while I lay completely paralyzed with fear beyond anything I could describe. Then he put his arms up, shook the lace back from his wrists and reached for my throat!

From somewhere I got strength enough to scream. The next second the man in purple had gone, and Godfrey was beside me. "What on earth—?" he was saying.

"I had a dream," I gasped. "A horrible dream—" but even while I said the words, I knew it hadn't been a dream. The man in purple had been real.

Eventually Godfrey went back to bed and to sleep. Nothing disturbed him. This time I went to sleep, but the man in purple was in my dreams, coming to me, freeing his wrists from the lace, reaching for my throat—finding it!

I woke up gasping for air, with actual pressure on my windpipe. It was more than a dream. The man in purple had come again.

I couldn't stand any more of this. I knew now it was a ghost. The man in purple had to be a ghost. There was no other explanation possible. I was quite sure, and further, positive that was the reason Raoul hadn't wanted us to stay. He *knew* about that man in purple.

I had two alternatives—to wake Godfrey, or get away from this room. Unfortunately for me, I chose the latter. Godfrey looked so comfortable I hated to rouse him again, and besides, I knew he'd laugh at the idea of a ghost. So I got out of bed, took the inevitable taffeta-covered eiderdown quilt always to be found on French beds, and tiptoed into the sitting room. I curled up in the eiderdown on the couch.

Again, I couldn't sleep. The man in purple was in my thoughts. I couldn't shake him off. I kept seeing him and his gesture of freeing his hands from encumbrances so that he would be free to murder. I kept feeling his hands reaching for my throat. But at long, long last, with the assistance of at least two hundred and fifty sheep that I laboriously counted, I fell into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion that comes when one is worn out mentally as well as physically.

A whispering woke me up—a whispering in French—French of the old style. If I hadn't spoken the language like a native I wouldn't have understood the whisperings. As it was, it was difficult—just as strange as listening to the talk of our Founding Fathers would be to modern ears.

The whispers said over and over, "Bring her here, Pierre. Bring her here to me and then go. Do not return no matter what you hear." And then there was a pause—a silence, while I heard a door shut and footsteps walk away. Then the whispers began again. "Soon, soon she will come," repeated a voice which had a hard quality underneath the softness of its tone and an underlying cruelty, and I knew that it was the voice of the man in purple, but I could not see him. I knew fear again and shrank into the eiderdown. Suppose those hands found my throat again—suppose— I wanted to scream, to run to Godfrey, but I couldn't move, and in the strange nightmare of events I know I shouldn't, and the knowledge was horrible.

The whisperings were gaining strength and volubility. It was an ordinary voice that spoke now in that antiquated French. "She is coming—she is here." As he mouthed the last word I could see him. It was the man in purple standing by the carved mantelpiece, watching the door. He was quite tangible, there was nothing ghost-like about him—no transparency, no luminosity—just a man out of another world. An evil man—his lips strained back from his teeth as a dog's do at the kill.

The door swung open, and I gasped. For there coming into the room was myself! Not the American Helen married to the English Godfrey, but a French Heléne. Not the frightened girl crouching on the sofa in her own time, but a frightened girl from some other age. The two entities were sepa-

rate, yet she was part of me just as I was part of her. *I* had been that girl, and I was looking at my own past—!

She was in the room now, sweeping low to the floor in a curtsey of the utmost grace. "Monsieur," she said, gently, but because she and I were one, I knew the effort she made to keep her voice steady. I felt the chill of her finger-tips, the frantic beating of her heart.

He raised her cold fingers to his lips. She shrank away from his touch. "So, Mademoiselle la Comtesse, you hate me for what I have done?"

She made no answer except with her eyes which justified his statement.

He let go her hand. "Yet I saved your father—"

"At a price, Monsieur." There was scorn in her voice.

He bowed. "As you say—at a price. Still, he is safe in England. That should be a fair exchange."

"My father would not think so—" There was color in her pale cheeks as she spoke, but it faded rapidly away.

"Nor do you—" his lips curved back from his teeth again in a gesture that was completely feline. "And what is more, you do not let me forget it. Your hatred for me is a wall between us. Your scorn is sharp knives that cut my flesh. Yes, great though I am, I feel small before you, and that is not to be endured."

"I cannot change my feelings, Monsieur." There was triumph on her face, all the more intense because it was restrained.

"But I can change your feelings, Mademoiselle! I can allow them the expanse of heaven, where the priests tell us there is only love, where I shall not be able to see them." He raised his hands in that familiar gesture, shaking back the lace to leave them free, and advanced toward her.

I felt the terror sweep over her, the loneliness, the pain. "Never to see my father again," she thought. "To have brought him to safety and not to share it. I would be glad to die were it not for him, but he needs me." Then as the man in purple advanced toward her, she sank down on her knees.

"Oh, Monsieur, I beg you spare my life. You promised once my father was safe, I could go to him. Surely you will not go back on your word. See, I who are proud, kneel before you."

I could have told her there was no use. I could see the inexorable purpose in those uplifted hands.

The man in purple laughed. It was a horrible laugh, deadly in intent. "So, the Comtesse de Tréves begs—and for once there is no sneer in her voice. Too late, my dear. Too late, Mademoiselle. Hate rouses hate."

She looked up at him then. "You are right, Monsieur. Hate rouses hate. It feeds upon it too, and I tell you now that my hate will live on down through the centuries until we two meet again, and the tables are turned."

"I will conquer then as I conquer now." He was almost within reach of her.

"Then I will come back again and again —age after age, and in the end, the score will be evened. I vow it so, Monsieur. Here and now, with death staring me in the face. And I curse you as no man has ever been cursed before. Here you shall stay and wait until I come again and then—"

THE hands of the man in purple flashed downwards to her throat, choking the words back into it, exerting more and more pressure until only her eyes blazed hate. Then he let go.

I was gasping — struggling and everything was growing black. There were fingers on my throat. Was I feeling the sensations of my ancient self that realistically?

This time the man in purple hadn't been touching me. It was the Comtesse de Tréves whose throat he held between those strong white hands, into whose windpipe the iron fingers pressed. And yet, with a tremendous effort I opened my eyes. There was no Comtesse de Tréves. There was no man in purple. But there *were* fingers around my throat—exerting such pressure that I could hardly breath—strong, white, deadly fingers — Godfrey's fingers! And everything was growing black. There were fingers on my throat, and I was feeling the sensations of my ancient self—but, Godfrey's fingers were dispensing death! His

face had no expression whatsoever. It was the face of a sleep-walker or a zombie, but his fingers were alive.

I tried to break their hold. I tried to scream, to pull those hands away from my throat—but I couldn't.

If it hadn't been for the eiderdown I should have been dead already. But I had drawn it up close around me and it was between my throat and those terrible fingers of Godfrey's. Even in the haze that was coming over me, I couldn't reconcile my thoughts to their being Godfrey's. The comforter prevented the fingers getting an absolute hold. It was slippery and the fact of it being there enabled me to breath a little. I saw that soon Godfrey's fingers would get a strangle hold. I had only a minute. There was a table beside the couch with an old porcelain vase on it. Somehow I managed to reach it with one hand, struggling all the time with what seemed to be Godfrey's superhuman strength. Still I got the vase in my hand, clasped its narrow neck, pulled it around and shattered it on Godfrey's head.

His fingers loosened. For one second his eyes held a startled expression, then he slumped down to the floor.

From somewhere I heard a soft voice, like the whisper of a sigh, "The score is evened."

I pulled myself together. Godfrey lay crumpled on the floor. I couldn't see any sign of life. I got to the telephone, and lifted off the instrument. Through my tortured throat I somehow got out the words, "Help! Help!" Then I fainted.

When I came to, Raoul was there and a doctor. Evidently a guest of the hotel as he had on a bathrobe over his pajamas. I was in the bedroom. I tried to talk and found I couldn't make a sound, but I mouthed the word, "Godfrey?"

"Madame, you must prepare yourself for a shock. Your husband . . . is dead. The burglar who choked you, hit him on the head with a vase when he came to your rescue. A very gallant gentleman, your husband. It is to be regretted that some nothing of a sneak thief should be the cause of terminating his life."

It was a long, elegantly phrased speech, typical of the French mind. The news wasn't a shock to me. I had known Godfrey was dead when I saw him crumpled on the floor. Twice, while the doctor was talking, I tried to break in to tell him that he was wrong—there had been no burglar, but I couldn't speak. My throat seemed paralyzed. Then, through my chaotic thoughts came some common sense. The truth was too incredible to be believed. With a rush of panic I remembered the tales I had heard of the French police and their endless red tape. I decided it was better to leave it as it was. They seemed to have built up a good explanation of events. What if they weren't quite true. It would be better that way. I would let it go.

Raoul was saying, "We have had several times trouble with sneak thieves already. He had picked the lock of your suite. The door was open."

Needless to tell him that Godfrey never locked doors. Everything was fitting in to support their story.

The doctor was telling me a nurse was coming to put cold compresses on my throat. I was not to worry—they would attend to all details. He also said he had given me a hypodermic for the pain. I managed to indicate that I did not want to stay where I was.

He looked bewildered, but Raoul understood. "It is light, now, Madame." He pointed to the window and I could see the first thin slivers of sunlight. Raoul went on. "You will be quite all right, Madame, and later in the day—long before it is dark—I will see you are moved."

It was with that assurance that I went to sleep.

When I woke, I had been moved as promised. Through the days that followed I didn't let myself think. It wasn't until I was leaving to go back to England that I pinned him down.

"Raoul," I said, "those rooms you gave us that night—they are haunted."

Shamefacedly he answered. "Yes, Madame. This hotel once was the home of a French noble, a very great nobleman, who managed to survive the Revolution because of his friendship with Phillipe L'Egalité. He maintained his power in the days of that gory holocaust. That has always stained

the white fingers of France. He was not a nice man. There are rumors of the things he did that I would not repeat to Madame. He was responsible for many deaths. Those rooms are in the oldest part of the building. They were his. People have seen him . . . dressed in purple. At first we tried to rent the rooms, ignoring the ghost-talk as old wives tales, but the guests complained. They saw him, they said, and he was evil. They felt the evil if they did not see it. One woman who was very psychic, said she saw him strangling someone. She was quite ill afterwards. . . ."

"Had he ever strangled anyone?" I broke in.

"Yes, Madame. So I have heard. He was proud of his strong hands. I once saw a picture of a young Comtesse he was supposed to have killed because she did not return his love. She looked rather like you, Madame. We haven't rented those rooms for a long time. Did you see anything, Madame, before the burglar came?"

So, we were to carry on with the burglar to the bitter end. It was too late now to do anything else when the authorities had concurred with the story so readily. "Yes, Raoul. I saw—the man in purple," I said slowly."

THE Man in Purple! Godfrey! Had they been one and the same? Certainly the Comtesse de Tréves was myself. I hadn't needed Raoul's talk of the resemblance to the picture to know that. The Man in Purple had killed her, but before she died she had cursed him—had condemned him to wait for her until she evened the score. Had that happened when I had, to save myself, killed Godfrey? Had Godfrey been the re-incarnation of the Man in Purple? Had he used him to try to conquer me?—The re-incarnation of the girl he had murdered.

Had he in some strange way taken possession of Godfrey's body for his own unholy purposes? Was Godfrey the man I loved?

Or was he the evil person whom I still regarded with horror? Had fate brought us to the rooms to work out destiny's pattern, or was it—? The questions were endless and they had been rotating in my mind for days. Ever since the night Godfrey died.

"It's a strange thing, Madame," Raoul was saying, "the room is no longer haunted. First the maid tells me she does not hear the knocking any more. Then the floorman tells me the same. So I spent a night there myself, and there was—nothing! Absolutely nothing. Not even a feeling of evil. This last week I have rented the rooms and there have been no complaints. Is it not strange, Madame?"

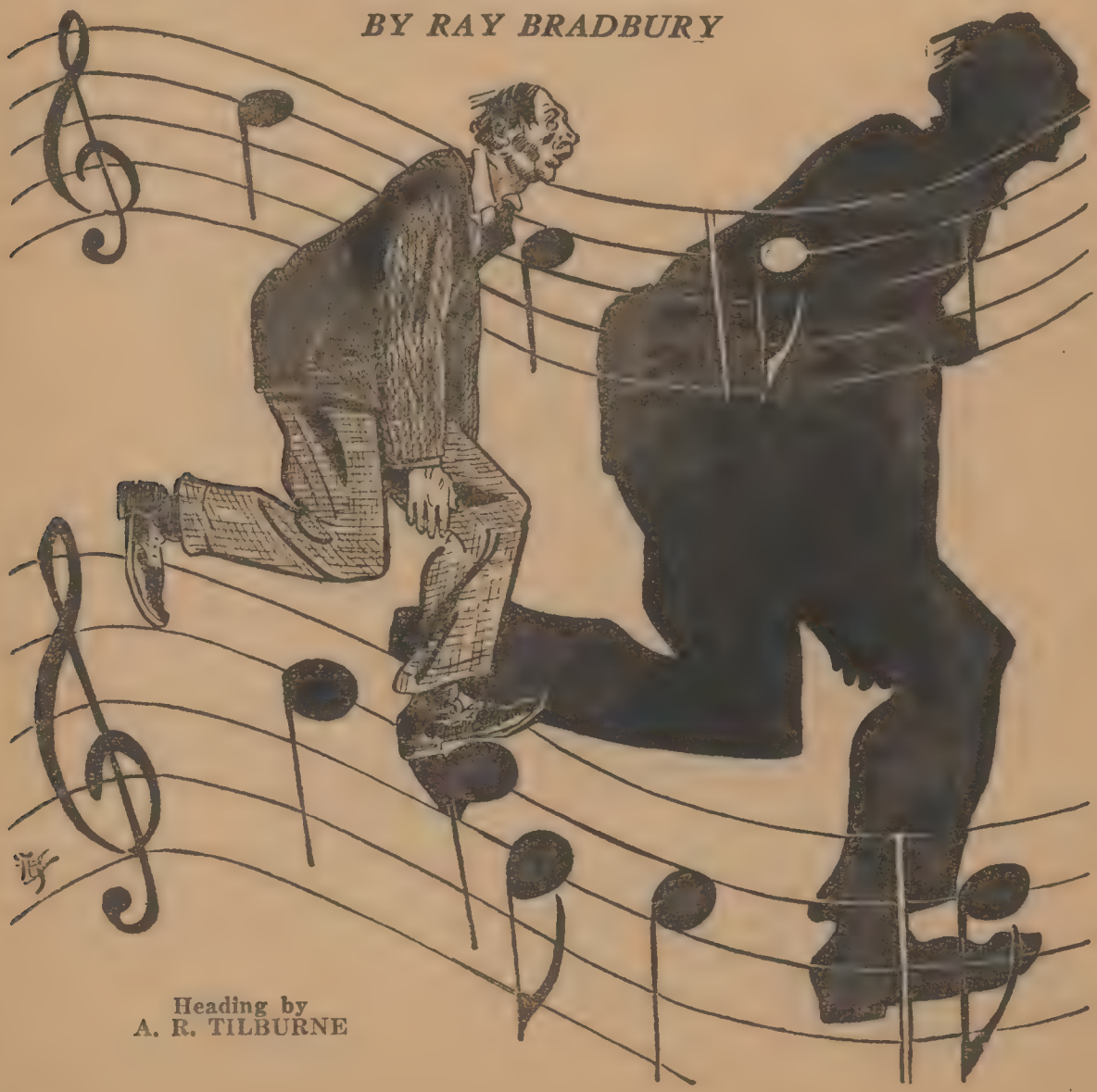
"Yes, Raoul." I couldn't say more. I had the answer to my questions now. Godfrey *had* been the Man in Purple. I no longer felt grief or guilt over his death. The Comtesse de Tréves had made good her promise. She had evened the score. The pendulum had swung wide and then gone back into place. The cycle was complete.

# The Smiling People

*Each sound had to be muffled for each sound was* fear

IT WAS the sensation of silence that was the most notable aspect of the house. As Mr. Greppin came through the front door the oiled silence of it opening and swinging closed behind him was like an opening and shutting dream, a thing accomplished on rubber pads, bathed in lubricant, slow and unmaterialistic. The double

***BY RAY BRADBURY***



Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

carpet in the hall, which he himself had so recently laid, gave off no sound from his movements. And when the wind shook the house late of nights there was not a rattle of eave or tremor of loose sash. He had himself checked the storm windows. The screen doors were securely hooked with bright new, firm hooks, and the furnace did not knock but sent a silent whisper of warm wind up the throats of the heating system that sighed ever so quietly, moving the cuffs of his trousers as he stood, now, warming himself from the bitter afternoon.

Weighing the silence with the remarkable instruments of pitch and balance in his small ears, he nodded with satisfaction that the silence was so unified and finished. Because there *had* been nights when rats had walked between wall-layers and it had taken baited traps and poisoned food before the walls were mute. Even the grandfather clock had been stilled, its brass pendulum hung frozen and gleaming in its long cedar, glass-fronted coffin.

*They* were waiting for him in the dining room.

He listened. They made no sound. Good. Excellent, in fact. They had learned, then, to be silent. You had to teach people, but it was worth while—there was not a rattle of knife or fork from the dining table. He worked off his thick grey gloves, hung up his cold armor of overcoat and stood there with an expression of urgency yet indecisiveness . . . thinking of what had to be done.

Mr. Greppin proceeded with familiar certainty and economy of motion into the dining room, where the four individuals seated at the waiting table did not move or speak a word. The only sound was the merest allowable pad of his shoes on the deep carpet.

His eyes, as usual, instinctively, fastened upon the lady heading the table. Passing, he waved a finger near her cheek. She did not blink.

Aunt Rose sat firmly at the head of the table and if a mote of dust floated lightly down out of the ceiling spaces, did her eye trace its orbit? Did the eye revolve in its shellacked socket, with glassy cold precision? And if the dust mote happened upon the shell of her wet eye did the eye batten? Did the muscles clinch, the lashes close?

No.

Aunt Rose's hand lay on the table like cutlery, rare and fine and old; tarnished. Her bosom was hidden in a salad of fluffy linen.

Beneath the table her stick legs in high-buttoned shoes went up into a pipe of dress. You felt that the legs terminated at the skirt line and from there on she was a department store dummy, all wax and nothingness responding, probably, with much the same chill waxen movements, with as much enthusiasm and response as a mannequin.

So here was Aunt Rose, staring straight at Greppin—he choked out a laugh and clapped hands derisively shut—there were the first hints of a dust mustache gathering across her upper lip!

"Good evening, Aunt Rose," he said, bowing. "Good evening, Uncle Dimity," he said, graciously. "No, not a word," he held up his hand. "Not a word from any of you." He bowed again. "Ah, good evening, cousin Lila, and you, cousin Sam."

Lila sat upon his left, her hair like golden shavings from a tube of lathed brass. Sam, opposite her, told all directions with *his* hair.

They were both young, he fourteen, she sixteen. Uncle Dimity, their father (but "father" was a nasty word!) sat next to Lila, placed in this secondary niche long, long ago because Aunt Rose said the window draft might get his neck if he sat at the head of the table. Ah, Aunt Rose!

Mr. Greppin drew the chair under his tight-clothed little rump and put a casual elbow to the linen.

"I've something to say," he said. "IT's very important. This has gone on for weeks now. It can't go any further. I'm in love. Oh, but I've told you that long ago. On the day I made you all smile, remember?"

THE eyes of the four seated people did not blink, the hands did not move.

Greppin became introspective. The day he had made them smile. Two weeks ago it was. He had come home, walked in, looked at them and said, "I'm to be married!"

They had all whirled with expressions as if someone had just smashed the window.

"You're WHAT?" cried Aunt Rose.

"To Alice Jane Ballard!" he had said, stiffening somewhat.

"Congratulations," said Uncle Dimity. "I guess," he added, looking at his wife. He cleared his throat. "But isn't it a little early, son?" He looked at his wife again. "Yes. Yes, I think it's a little early. I wouldn't advise it yet, not just yet, no."

"The house is in a terrible way," said Aunt Rose. "We won't have it fixed for a year yet."

"That's what you said last year and the year before," said Mr. Greppin. "And anyway," he said bluntly, "this is *my* house."

Aunt Rose's jaw had clamped at that. "After all these years for us to be bodily thrown out, why I—"

"You won't be thrown out, don't be idiotic," said Greppin, furiously.

"Now, Rose—" said Uncle Dimity in a pale tone.

Aunt Rose dropped her hands. "After all I've done—"

In that instant Greppin had known they would *have* to go, all of them. First he would make them silent, then he would make them smile, then, later, he would move them out like luggage. He couldn't bring Alice Jane into a house full of grims such as these, where Aunt Rose followed you wherever you went even when she wasn't following you, and the children performed indignities upon you at a glance from their maternal parent, and the father, no better than a third child, carefully rearranged his advice to you on being a bachelor. Greppin stared at them. It was their fault that his loving and living was all wrong. If he did something about them —then his warm bright dreams of soft bodies glowing with an anxious perspiration of love might become tangible and near. Then he would have the house all to himself and—and Alice Jane. Yes, Alice Jane.

They would have to go. Quickly. If he told them to go, as he had often done, twenty years might pass as Aunt Rose gathered sunbleached sachets and Edison phonographs. Long before then Alice Jane herself would be moved and gone.

Greppin looked at them as he picked up the carving knife.

GREPPIN'S head snapped with tiredness. He flicked his eyes open. Eh? Oh, he had been drowsing, thinking.

All *that* had occurred two weeks ago. Two weeks ago this very night that conversation about marriage, moving, Alice Jane, had come about. Two weeks ago it had been. Two weeks ago he had made them smile.

Now, recovering from his reverie, he smiled around at the silent and motionless figures. They smiled back in peculiarly pleasing fashion.

"I hate you, old woman," he said to Aunt Rose, directly. "Two weeks ago I wouldn't have dared say that. Tonight, ah, well—" he lazed his voice, turning. "Uncle Dimity, let me give you a little advice, old man—"

He talked small talk, picked up a spoon, pretended to eat peaches from an empty dish. He had already eaten downtown in a tray cafeteria; pork, potatoes, apple pie, string beans, beets, potato salad. But now he made dessert eating motions because he enjoyed this little act. He made as if he were chewing.

"So—tonight you are finally, once and for all, moving out. I've waited two weeks, thinking it all over. In a way I guess I've kept you here this long because I wanted to keep an eye on you. Once you're gone, I can't be sure—" And here his eyes gleamed with fear. "You might come prowling around, making noises at night, and I couldn't stand that. I can't ever have noises in this house, not even when Alice moves in. . . ."

The double carpet was thick and soundless underfoot, reassuring.

"Alice wants to move in day after tomorrow. We're getting married."

Aunt Rose winked evilly, doubtfully at him.

"Ah!" he cried, leaping up, then, staring, he sank down, mouth convulsing. He released the tension in him, laughing. "Oh, I see. It was a fly." He watched the fly crawl with slow precision on the ivory cheek of Aunt Rose and dart away. Why did it have to pick that instant to make her eye appear to blink, to doubt. "Do you doubt I ever will marry, Aunt Rose? Do you think me incapable of marriage, of love

and love's duties? Do you think me immature, unable to cope with a woman and her ways of living? Do you think me a child, only daydreaming? Well!" He calmed himself with an effort, shaking his head. "Man, man," he argued to himself. "It was only a fly, and does a fly make doubt of love, or did you make it into a fly and a wink? Damn it!" He pointed at the four of them.

"I'm going to fix the furnace hotter. In an hour I'll be moving you out of the house once and for all. You comprehend? Good. I see you do."

Outside, it was beginning to rain, a cold drizzling downpour that drenched the house. A look of irritation came to Greppin's face. The sound of the rain was the one thing he couldn't stop, couldn't be helped. No way to buy new hinges or lubricants or hooks for that. You might tent the housetop with lengths of cloth to soften the sound, mightn't you? That's going a bit far. No. No way of preventing the rain sounds.

He wanted silence now, where he had never wanted it before in his life so much. Each sound was a fear. So each sound had to be muffled, gotten to and eliminated.

The drum of rain was like the knuckles of an impatient man on a surface. He lapsed again into remembering.

He remembered the rest of it. The rest of that hour on that day two weeks ago when he had made them smile. . . .

He had taken up the carving knife and prepared to cut the bird upon the table. As usual the family had been gathered, all wearing their solemn, puritanical masks. If the children smiled the smiles were stepped on like nasty bugs by Aunt Rose.

Aunt Rose criticized the angle of Greppin's elbows as he cut the bird. The knife, she made him understand also, was not sharp enough. Oh, yes, the sharpness of the knife. At this point in his memory he stopped, rolled-tilted his eyes, and laughed. Dutifully, then, he had crisped the knife on the sharpening rod and again set upon the fowl.

He had severed away much of it in some minutes before he slowly looked up at their solemn, critical faces, like puddings with agate eyes, and after staring at them a moment, as if discovered with a naked woman instead of a naked-limbed partridge, he lifted the knife and cried hoarsely, "Why in God's name can't you, any of you, ever smile? I'll *make* you smile!"

He raised the knife a number of times like a magician's wand.

And, in a short interval—behold! they were *all* of them smiling!

HE BROKE that memory in half, crumpled it, balled it, tossed it down. Rising briskly, he went to the hall, down the hall to the kitchen, and from there down the dim stairs into the cellar where he opened the furnace door and built the fire steadily and expertly into wonderful flame.

Walking upstairs again he looked about him. He would have cleaners come and clean the empty house, redecorators slide down the dull drapes and hoist new shimmery banners up. New thick Oriental rugs purchased for the floors would subtly insure the silence he desired and would need at least for the next month, if not for the entire year.

He put his hands to his face. What if Alice Jane made noise moving about the house? Some noise, some how, some place!

And then he laughed. It was quite a joke. That problem was already solved. Yes, it was solved. He need fear no noise from Alice Jane. It was all absurdly simple. He would have all the pleasure of Alice Jane and none of the dream-destroying distractions and discomforts.

There was one other addition needed to the quality of silence. Upon the tops of the doors that the wind sucked shut with a bang at frequent intervals he would install air-compression brakes, those kind they have on library doors that hiss gently as their levers seal.

He passed through the dining room. The figures had not moved from their tableau. Their hands remained affixed in familiar positions, and their indifference to him was not impoliteness.

He climbed the hall stairs to change his clothing, preparatory to the task of moving the family. Taking the links from his fine cuffs, he swung his head to one side. Music. At first he paid it no mind. Then, slowly,

his face swinging to the ceiling, the color drained out of his cheeks.

At the very apex of the house the music began, note by note, one note following another, and it terrified him.

Each note came like a plucking of one single harp thread. In the complete silence the small sound of it was made larger until it grew all out of proportion to itself, gone mad with all this soundlessness to stretch about in.

The door opened in an explosion from his hands, the next thing his feet were trying the stairs to the third level of the house, the bannister twisted in a long polished snake under his tightening, relaxing, reaching-up, pulling-hands! The steps went under to be replaced by longer, higher, darker steps. He had started the game at the bottom with a slow stumbling, now he was running with full impetus and if a wall had suddenly confronted him he would not have stopped for it until he saw blood on it and fingernail scratches where he tried to pass through.

He felt like a mouse running in a great clear space of a bell. And high in the bell sphere the one harp thread hummed. It drew him on, caught him up with an unbilical of sound, gave his fear sustenance and life, mothered him. Fears passed between mother and groping child. He sought to shear the connection with his hands, could not. He felt as if someone had given a heave on the cord, wriggling.

Another clear threaded tone. And another.

"No, keep quiet," he shouted. "There can't be noise in my house. Not since two weeks ago. I said there would be no more noise. So it can't be—it's impossible! Keep quiet!"

He burst upward into the attic.

Relief can be hysteria.

Teardrops fell from a vent in the roof and struck, shattering upon a tall neck of Swedish cut-glass flowerware with resonant tone.

He shattered the vase with one swift move of his triumphant foot!

PICKING out and putting on an old shirt and old pair of pants in his room, he chuckled. The music was gone, the vent plugged, the silence again insured. There are silences and silences. Each with its own identity. There were summer night silences, which weren't silences at all, but layer on layer of insect chorals and the sound of electric arc lamps swaying in lonely small orbits on lonely country roads, casting out feeble rings of illumination upon which the night fed—summer night silence which, to be a silence, demanded an indolence and a neglect and an indifference upon the part of the listener. Not a silence at all! And there was a winter silence, but it was an incoffined silence, ready to burst out at the first touch of spring, things had a compression, a not-for-long feel, the silence made a sound unto itself, the freezing was so complete it made chimes of everything or detonations of a single breath or word you spoke at midnight in the diamond air. No, it was not a silence worthy of the name. A silence between two lovers, when there need be no words. Color came in his cheeks, he shut his eyes. It was a most pleasant silence, a perfect silence with Alice Jane. He had seen to that. *Everything* was perfect.

Whispering.

He hoped the neighbors hadn't heard him shrieking like a fool.

A faint whispering.

Now, about silences. The best silence was one conceived in every aspect by an individual, himself, so that there could be no bursting of crystal bonds, or electric-insect hummings, the human mind could cope with each sound, each emergency, until such a complete silence was achieved that one could hear ones cells adjust in ones hand.

A whispering.

He shook his head. There was no whispering. There could be none in *his* house. Sweat began to seep down his body, he began to shake in small, imperceptible shakings, his jaw loosened, his eyes were turned free in their sockets.

Whisperings. Low rumors of talk.

"I tell you I'm getting married," he said, weakly, loosely.

"You're lying," said the whispers.

His head fell forward on its neck as if hung, chin on chest.

"Her name is Alice Jane Ballard—" he

mouthed it between soft, wet lips and the words were formless. One of his eyes began to jitter its lid up and down as if blinking out a message to some unseen guest. "You can't stop me from loving her, I love her—"

Whispering.

He took a blind step forward.

The cuff of his pants leg quivered as he reached the floor grille of the ventilator. A hot rise of air followed his cuffs. Whispering.

The furnace.

HE WAS on his way downstairs when someone knocked on the front door. He leaned against it. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Greppin?"

Greppin drew in his breath. "Yes?"

"Will you let us in, please?"

"Well, who is it?"

"The police," said the man outside.

"What do you want, I'm just sitting down to supper!"

"Just want a talk with you. The neighbors phoned. Said they hadn't seen your Aunt and Uncle for two weeks. Heard a noise awhile ago—"

"I assure you everything is all right." He forced a laugh.

"Well, then," continued the voice outside, "we can talk it over in friendly style if you'll only open the door."

"I'm sorry," insisted Greppin. "I'm tired and hungry, come back tomorrow. I'll talk to you then, if you want me to."

"I'll have to insist, Mr. Greppin."

They began to beat against the door.

Greppin turned automatically, stiffly, walked down the hall past the old clock, into the dining room, without a word. He seated himself without looking at any one in particular and then he began to talk, slowly at first, then more rapidly.

"Some pests at the door. You'll talk to them, won't you, Aunt Rose? You'll tell them to go away, won't you, we're eating dinner? Everyone else go on eating and look pleasant and they'll go away, if they do come in. Aunt Rose you *will* talk to them, won't you? And now that things are happening I have something to tell you." A few hot tears fell for no reason. He looked at them as they soaked and spread in the white linen, vanishing. "I don't know any one named Alice Jane Ballard. I never knew any one named Alice Jane Ballard. It was all—all—I don't know. I said I loved her and wanted to marry her to get around somehow to make you smile. Yes, I said it because I planned to make you smile, that was the only reason. I'm never going to have a woman, I always knew for years I never would have. Will you please pass the potatoes, Aunt Rose?"

THE front door splintered and fell. A heavy softened rushing filled the hall. Men broke into the dining room.

A hesitation.

The police inspector hastily removed his hat.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he apologized. "I didn't mean to intrude upon your supper, I—"

The sudden halting of the police was such that their movement shook the room. The movement catapulted the bodies of Aunt Rose and Uncle Dimity straight away to the carpet, where they lay, their throats severed in a half moon from ear to ear—which caused them, like the children seated at the table, to have what was the horrid illusion of a smile under their chins, ragged smiles that welcomed in the late arrivals and told them everything with a simple grimace. . . .

# Mistress Sary

*Incredible things can happen to the rhythm of an ancient jingle!*

***BY WILLIAM TENN***

THIS evening, as I was about to enter my home, I saw two little girls bouncing a ball solemnly on the pavement to the rhythm of a very old little girls' chant. My lips must have gone gray as the sudden pressure of my set jaws numbed all feeling, blood pounded in my right temple; and I knew, that whatever might happen, I couldn't take another step until they had finished.

**Heading by FRED HUMISTON**

*"One, two; three alary—*
*I spy Mistress Sary*
*Sitting on a bumble-ary,*
*Just like a little fairy!"*

As the girl finished the last smug note, I came to life. I unlocked the door of my house and locked it behind me hurriedly. I switched on the lights in the foyer, the kitchen, the library. And then, for long forgotten minutes, I paced the floor until my breathing slowed and the horrible memory cowered back into the crevice of the years.

That verse! I don't hate children—no matter what my friends say, I don't hate children—but why do they have to sing that stupid, little song? Whenever I'm around. . . . As if the unspeakably vicious creatures know what it does to me. . . .

Sarietta Hawn came to live with Mrs. Clayton when her father died in the West Indies. Her mother had been Mrs. Clayton's only sister, and her father, a British colonial administrator, had no known relatives. It was only natural that the child should be sent across the Caribbean to join my landlady's establishment in Nanville. It was natural, too, that she should be enrolled in the Nanville Grade School where I taught arithmetic and science to the accompaniment of Miss Drury's English, history and geography.

"That Hawn child is impossible, unbelievable!" Miss Drury stormed into my classroom at the morning recess. "She's a freak, an impudent, ugly little freak!"

I waited for the echoes to die down in the empty classroom and considered Miss Drury's dowdy, Victorian figure with amusement. Her heavily corseted bosom heaved and the thick skirts and petticoats slapped against her ankles as she walked feverishly in front of my desk. I leaned back and braced my arms against my head.

"Now you better be careful. I've been very busy for the past two weeks with a new term and all, and I haven't had a chance to take a good look at Sarietta. Mrs. Clayton doesn't have any children of her own, though, and since the girl arrived on Thursday the woman has been falling all over her with affection. She won't stand for punishing Sarietta like—well, like you did Joey Richards last week. Neither will the school board for that matter."

Miss Drury tossed her head angrily. "When you've been teaching as long as I have, young man, you'll learn that sparing the rod just does not work with stubborn brats like Joey Richards. He'll grow up to be the same kind of no-account drunk as his father if I don't give him a taste of birch whenever he gets uppity."

"All right. Just remember that several members of the school board are beginning to watch you very closely. Now what's this about Sarietta Hawn being a freak? She's an albino, as I recall; lack of pigmentation is due to a chance factor of heredity, not at all freakish, and is experienced by thousands of people who lead normal happy lives."

"Heredity!" A contemptuous sniff. "More of that new nonsense. She's a freak, I tell you, as nasty a little devil as Satan ever made. When I asked her to tell the class about her home in the West Indies, she stood up and squeaked, 'That is a book closed to fools and simpletons.' Well! If the recess bell hadn't rung at that moment, I tell you I'd have laced into her right then and there."

She glanced down at her watch pendant. "Recess almost over. You'd better have the bell system checked, Mr. Flynn: I think it rang a minute too early this morning. And don't allow that Hawn child to give you any sass."

"None of the children ever do." I grinned as the door slammed behind her.

A moment later there was laughter and chatter as the room filled with eight-year-olds.

I BEGAN my lesson on long division with a covert glance at the last row. Sarietta Hawn sat stiffly there, her hands neatly clasped on the desk. Against the mahogany veneer of the classroom furniture, her long, ashen pigtails and absolutely white skin seemed to acquire a yellowish tinge. Her eyes were slightly yellow, too, great colorless irises under semi-transparent lids that never blinked while I looked at her.

She *was* an ugly child. Her mouth was far too generous for beauty; her ears stood

out almost at right angles to her head; and the long tip of her nose had an odd curve down and in to her upper lip. She wore a snow-white frock of severe cut that added illogical years to her thin body.

When I finished the arithmetic lesson, I walked up to the lonely little figure in the rear. "Wouldn't you like to sit a little closer to my desk?" I asked in as gentle a voice as I could. "You'd find it easier to see the blackboard."

She rose and dropped a swift curtsey. "I thank you very much, sir, but the sunlight at the front of the classroom hurts my eyes. There is always more comfort for me in darkness and in shade." The barest, awkward flash of a grateful smile.

I nodded, feeling uncomfortable at her formal, correct sentences.

During the science lesson, I felt her eyes upon me wherever I moved. I found myself fumbling at the equipment under that unwinking scrutiny, and the children, sensing the cause, began to whisper and crane their necks to the back of the room.

A case of mounted butterflies slid out of my hands. I stopped to pick it up. Suddenly a great gasp rippled over the room, coming simultaneously from thirty little throats.

"Look! She's doing it again!" I straightened.

Sarietta Hawn hadn't moved from her strange, stiff position. But her hair was a rich chestnut now; her eyes were blue; her cheeks and lips bore a delicate rose tint.

My fingers dug into the unyielding surface of my desk. Impossible! Yet could light and shade play such fantastic tricks? But—impossible!

Even as I gaped, unconscious of my pedagogical dignity, the child seemed to blush and a shadow over her straighten. I went back to cocoons and *Lepidoptera* with a quavering voice.

A moment later, I noticed that her face and hair were of purest white once more. I wasn't interested in explanations, however; neither was the class. The lesson was ruined.

"She did exactly the same thing in my class," Miss Drury exclaimed at lunch. "Exactly the same thing! Only it seemed to me that she was a dark brunette, with velvet black hair and snapping black eyes. It was just after she'd called me a fool—the nerve of that snip!—and I was reaching for the birch rod, when she seemed to go all dark and swarthy. I'd have made her change to red though, I can tell you, if that bell hadn't rung a minute too early."

"Maybe," I said. "But with that sort of delicate coloring any change in lighting would play wild tricks with your vision. I'm not so sure now that I saw it after all. Sarietta Hawn is no chameleon."

THE old teacher tightened her lips until they were a pale, pink line cutting across her wrinkled face. She shook her head and leaned across the crumb-bespattered table. "No chameleon. A witch. I know! And the bible commands us to destroy witches, to burn them out of life."

My laugh echoed uncomfortably around the dirty school basement which was our lunchroom. "You can't believe that! An eight-year-old girl—"

"All the more reason to catch her before she grows up and does real harm. I tell you, Mr. Flynn, I know! One of my ancestors burned thirty witches in New England during the trials. My family has a special sense for the creatures. There can be no peace between us!"

The other children shared an awed agreement with Miss Drury. They began calling the albino child "Mistress Sary." Sarietta, on the other hand, seemed to relish the nickname. When Joey Richards tore into a group of children who were following her down the street and shouting the song, she stopped him.

"Leave them alone, Joseph," she warned him in her curious adult phraseology. "They are quite correct: I *am* just like a little fairy."

And Joey turned his freckled, puzzled face and unclenched his fists and walked slowly back to her side. He worshiped her. Possibly because the two of them were outcasts in that juvenile community, possibly because they were both orphans—his eternally soused father was slightly worse than no parent at all—they were always together. I'd find him squatting at her feet in the humid twilight when I came out on the boarding house porch for my nightcap of

fresh air. She would pause in mid-sentence, one tiny forefinger still poised sharply. Both of them would sit in absolute silence until I left the porch.

Joey liked me a little. Thus I was one of the few privileged to hear of Mistress Sary's earlier life. I turned one evening when I was out for a stroll to see Joey trotting behind me. He had just left the porch.

"Gee," he sighed. "Stogolo sure taught Mistress Sary a lot. I wish that guy was around to take care of Old Dreary. He'd teach her all right, all right."

"Stogolo?"

"Sure. He was the witch-doctor who put the devil-birth curse on Sary's mother before Sary was born 'cause she had him put in jail. Then when Sary's mother died giving birth, Sary's father started drinking, she says, worse'n my pop. Only she found Stogolo and made friends with him. They mixed blood and swore peace on the grave of Sary's mother. And he taught her voodoo an' the devil-birth curse an' how to make love charms from hog liver an'—"

"I'm surprised at you, Joey," I interrupted. "Taking in that silly superstition! A boy who does as well as you in science! Mistress Sary—Sarietta grew up in a primitive community where people didn't know any better. But you do!"

He scuffed the weeds at the edge of the sidewalk with a swinging foot. "Yeah," he said in a low voice. "Yeah. I'm sorry I mentioned it, Mr. Flynn."

THEN he was off, a lithe streak in white blouse and corduroy knickers, tearing along the sidewalk to his home. I regretted my interruption, then, since Joey was rarely confidential and Sarietta spoke only when spoken to, even with her aunt.

I've regretted it much, *much* more ever since.

The weather grew surprisingly warmer. "I declare," Miss Drury told me one morning, "I've never seen a winter like this in my life. Indian summers and heat waves are one thing, but to go on this way day after day without any sign of a break, Land sake's!"

"Scientists say the entire earth is developing a warmer climate. Of course, it's almost imperceptible right now, but the Gulf Stream—"

"The Gulf Stream," she ridiculed. She wore the same starched and heavy clothes as always and the heat was reducing her short temper to a blazing point. "The Gulf Stream! Ever since that Hawn brat came to live in Nanville the world's been turning turtle. My chalk is always breaking, my desk drawers get stuck, the erasers fall apart—the little witch is trying to put a spell on me!"

"Now look here." I stopped and faced her with my back to the school building. "This has gone far enough. If you do have to believe in witchcraft, keep it out of your relations with the children. They're here to absorb knowledge, not the hysterical imaginings of a—of a—"

"Of a sour old maid. Yes, go ahead, say it," she snarled. "I know you think it, Mr. Flynn. You fawn all over her so she leaves you be. But I know what I know and so does that evil little thing you call Sarietta Hawn. It's war between us, and the all-embracing battle between good and evil will never be over until one or the other of us is dead!" She turned in a spiral of skirts and swept up the path into the schoolhouse.

I began to fear for her sanity then. I had not yet learned to fear for mine.

That was the day my arithmetic class entered slowly, quietly as if a bubble of silence enveloped them. The moment the door shut behind the last pupil, the bubble broke and whispers splattered all over the room.

"Where's Sarietta Hawn?" I asked. "And Joey Richards," I amended, unable to find him either.

Louise Bell rose, her starched pink dress curving in front of her scrawny body. "They've been naughty. Miss Drury caught Joey cutting a lock of hair off her head and she started to whip him. Then Mistress Sary stood up and said she wasn't to touch him because he was under her pro-tec-tion. So Miss Drury sent us all out and now I bet she's going to whip them both. She's real mad!"

I started for the back door rapidly. Abruptly a scream began. Sarietta's voice! I tore down the corridor. The scream rose

to a high treble, wavered for a second. Then stopped.

As I jolted open the door of Miss Drury's classroom, I was prepared for anything, including murder. I was not prepared for what I saw. I stood, my hand grasping the door knob, absorbing the tense tableau.

Joey Richards was backed against the blackboard, squeezing a long tendril of brownish hair in his sweaty right palm. Mistress Sary stood in front of Miss Drury, her head bent to expose a brutal red welt on the back of her chalky neck. And Miss Drury was looking stupidly at a fragment of birch in her hand; the rest of the rod lay in scattered pieces at her feet.

THE children saw me and came to life. Mistress Sary straightened and with set lips moved toward the door. Joey Richards leaned forward. He rubbed the lock of hair against the back of the teacher's dress, she completely oblivious to him. When he joined the girl at the door, I saw that the hair glistened with the perspiration picked up from Miss Drury's blouse.

At a slight nod from Mistress Sary, the boy passed the lock of hair over to her. She placed it very carefully in the pocket of her frock.

Then, without a single word, they both skipped around me on their way to join the rest of the class.

Evidently they were unharmed, at least seriously.

I walked over to Miss Drury. She was trembling violently and talking to herself. She never removed her eyes from the fragment of birch.

"It just flew to pieces. Flew to pieces! I was—when it flew to pieces!"

Placing an arm about her waist, I guided the spinster to a chair. She sat down and continued mumbling.

"Once—I just struck her once. I was raising my arm for another blow—the birch was over my head—when it flew to pieces. Joey was off in a corner—he couldn't have done it—the birch just flew to pieces." She stared at the piece of wood in her hand and rocked her body back and forth slowly, like one mourning a great loss.

I had a class. I got her a glass of water, notified the janitor to take care of her and hurried back.

Somebody, in a childish spirit of ridicule or meanness, had scrawled a large verse across the blackboard in my room:

*"One, two, three alary—*
*I spy Mistress Sary*
*Sitting on a bumble-ary,*
*Just like a little fairy!"*

I turned angrily to the class. I noticed a change in seating arrangements. Joey Richards' desk was empty.

He had taken his place with Mistress Sary in the long, deep shadows at the back of the room.

TO MY breathless relief, Mistress Sary didn't mention the incident. As always she was silent at the supper table, her eyes fixed rigidly on her plate. She excused herself the moment the meal was over and slipped away. Mrs. Clayton was evidently too bustling and talkative to have heard of it. There would be no repercussions from that quarter.

After supper I walked over to the old-fashioned gabled house where Miss Drury lived with her relatives. Lakes of perspiration formed on my body and I found it all but impossible to concentrate. Every leaf on every tree hung motionless in the humid, breezeless night.

The old teacher was feeling much better. But she refused to drop the matter; to do, as I suggested, her best to reestablish amity. She rocked herself back and forth in great scoops of the colonial rocking-chair and shook her head violently.

"No, no, *no!* I won't make friends with that imp of darkness: sooner shake hands with Beelzebub himself. She hates me now worse than ever because—don't you see—I forced her to declare herself. I've made her expose her witchery. Now—now I must grapple with her and overthrow her and Him who is her mentor. I must think, I must—only it's so devilishly hot. So very hot! My mind—my mind doesn't seem to work right." She wiped her forehead with the heavy cashmere shawl.

As I strolled back, I fumbled unhappily for a solution. Something would break

soon at this rate; then the school board would be down upon us with an investigation and the school would go to pot. I tried to go over the possibilities calmly but my clothes stuck to my body and breathing was almost drudgery.

Our porch was deserted. I saw movement in the garden and hurried over. Two shadows resolved into Mistress Sary and Joey Richards. They stared up as if waiting for me to declare myself.

She was squatting on the ground and holding a doll in her hands. A small wax doll with brownish hair planted in her head that was caught in a stern bun just like the bun Miss Drury affected. A stiff little doll with a dirty piece of muslin for a dress cut in the same long, severe pattern as all of Miss Drury's clothes. A carefully executed caricature in wax.

"Don't you think that's a bit silly," I managed to ask at last. "Miss Drury is sufficiently upset and sorry for what she did for you to play upon her superstitions in this horrible way. I'm sure if you try hard enough, we can all be friends."

They rose, Sarietta clutching the doll to her breast. "It is not silly, Mr. Flynn. That bad woman must be taught a lesson. A terrible lesson she will never forget. Excuse my abruptness, sir, but I have much work to do this night."

And then she was gone, a rustling patch of whiteness that slipped up the stairs and disappeared into the sleeping house.

I turned to the boy.

"Joey, you're a pretty smart fellow. Man to man now—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Flynn." He started for the gate. "I—I got to go home." I heard the rhythmic pad of his sneakers on the sidewalk grow faint and dissolve in the distance. I had evidently lost his allegiance.

Sleep came hard that night. I tossed on entangling sheets, dozed, came awake and dozed again.

ABOUT midnight, I woke shuddering. I punched the pillow and was about to attempt unconsciousness once more when my ears caught a faint note of sound. I recognized it. That was what had reached into my dreams and tugged my eyes open to fear. I sat upright.

Sarietta's voice!

She was singing a song, a rapid song with unrecognizable words. Higher and higher up the scale it went, and faster and faster as if there were some eerie deadline she had to meet. At last, when it seemed that she would shrill beyond the limits of human audibility, she paused. Then, on a note so high that my ear drums ached, came a drawn-out, flowing "Kurunoo O Stogo-loooo!"

Silence.

Two hours later, I managed to fall asleep again.

THE sun burning redly through my eyelids wakened me. I dressed, feeling oddly listless and apathetic. I wasn't hungry and, for the first morning of my life, went without breakfast.

The heat came up from the sidewalk and drenched my face and hands. My feet felt the burning concrete through the soles of my shoes. Even the shade of the school building was an unnoticeable relief.

Miss Drury's appetite was gone too. She left her carefully wrapped lettuce sandwiches untouched on the basement table. She supported her head on her thin hands and stared at me out of red-rimmed eyes.

"It's so hot!" she whispered. "I can hardly stand it. Why everyone feels so sorry for that Hawn brat, I can't understand. Just because I made her sit in the sunlight. I've been suffering from this heat a thousand times more than she."

"You . . . . made—Sarietta . . . sit—in—"

"Of course I did! She's no privileged character. Always in the back of the room where it's cool and comfortable. I made her change her desk so that she's right near the large window, where the sunlight streams in. And she feels it too, let me tell you. Only—ever since, I've been feeling worse. As if I'm falling apart. I didn't have a wink of sleep last night—those terrible, terrible dreams: great hands pulling and mauling me, knives pricking my face and my hands—"

"But the child can't stand sunlight! She's an albino."

"Albino, fiddlesticks! She's a witch. She'll be making wax dolls next. Joey

Richards didn't try to cut my hair for a joke. He had orders to— Ooh!" She doubled in her chair. "Those cramps!"

I waited until the attack subsided and watched her sweaty, haggard face. "Funny that you should mention wax dolls. You have the girl so convinced that she's a witch that she's actually making them. Believe it or not, last night, after I left you—"

She had jumped to her feet and was rigid attention. One arm supporting her body against a steam pipe, she stood staring at me.

"She made a wax doll. Of me?"

"Well, you know how a child is. It was her idea of what you looked like. A little crude in design, but a good piece of workmanship. Personally, I think her talent merits encouragement."

Miss Drury hadn't heard me. "Cramps!" she mused. "And I thought they were cramps! She's been sticking pins into me! The little— I've got to— But I must be careful. Yet fast. Fast."

I got to my feet and tried to put my hand on her shoulder across the luncheon table. "Now pull yourself together. Surely this is going altogether too far."

She leaped away and stood near the stairs talking rapidly to herself. "I can't use a stick or a club—she controls them. But my hands—if I can get my hands on her and choke fast enough, she can't stop me. But I mustn't give her a chance," she almost sobbed, *"I mustn't give her a chance!"*

Then she had leaped up the stairs in a sudden, determined rush.

I swept the table out of my way and bolted after her.

MOST of the children were eating their lunches along the long board fence at the end of the school yard. But they had stopped now and were watching something with frightened fascination. Sandwiches hung suspended in front of open mouths. I followed the direction of their stares.

Miss Drury was slipping along the side of the building like an upright, skirted panther. She staggered now and then and held on to a wall. Some two feet in front of her, Sarietta Hawn and Joey Richards sat in the shade. They were looking intently at a wax doll in a muslin dress that had been set on the cement just outside the fringe of coolness. It lay on its back in the direct sunlight and, even at that distance, I could see it was melting.

"Hi," I shouted. "Miss Drury! Be sensible!" I ran for them.

At my cry, both children looked up startled. Miss Drury launched herself forward and fell, rather than leaped, on the little girl. Joey Richards grabbed the doll and rolled out of the way toward me. I tripped over him and hit the ground with a bone-breaking wallop. As I turned in mid-air, I caught a fast glimpse of Miss Drury's right hand flailing over the girl. Sarietta had huddled into a pathetic little bundle under the teacher's body.

I sat up facing Joey. Behind me the children were screaming as I had never heard them scream before.

Joey was squeezing the doll with both hands. As I watched, not daring to remove my eyes, the wax—already softened by the sunlight—lost its shape and came through the cracks in his tight freckled fingers. It dripped through the muslin dress and fell in blobs on the school yard cement.

Over and above the yells of the children, Miss Drury's voice rose to a mind-cracking scream and went on and on and on.

Joey looked over my shoulder with rolling eyes. But he kept on squeezing the doll and I kept my eyes on it desperately, prayerfully, while the screaming went on all about me and the immense sun pushed the perspiration steadily down my face. As the wax oozed through his fingers, he began singing suddenly in a breathless, hysterical cackle. Louder and louder grew his voice until it seemed to dominate the world:

*"One, two, three alary—*
*I spy Mistress Sary*
*Sitting on a bumble-ary,*
*Just like a little fairy!"*

And Miss Drury screamed and the children yelled and Joey sang, but I kept my eyes on the little wax doll. *I kept my eyes on the little wax doll drooling through the cracks of Joey Richards' strained, little fingers. I kept my eyes on the doll. . . .*

# The Corbie Door

*BY CARL JACOBI*

ON THE eighteenth of June I received word from my solicitor that the final papers had been signed and everything was ready for my occupancy of Corbie House. The long months of litigation over my uncle's estate were thus at an end, and there was no longer the necessity of spending the sultry months in a Blooms-

*The door that leads to the past must never be opened all the way!*

**Heading by M. N. BEALE**

bury flat, a prospect which, considering the delicate condition of my wife's health, had loomed as an ordeal.

Debora and I acted at once. We closed up the flat; I arranged to have young Ames take over my business until further notice; and we caught the 4:30 train for Langham. Until the train rolled out of Paddington we were in good spirits, bouyant with the expectancy of a new life. Then the sky became overcast and a drizzle of rain began to fall. Debora's mood, always susceptible to weather changes, dampened perceptibly.

"How long has the house been closed?" she asked suddenly, and added, "Perhaps the roof leaks."

I laughed. "I think you'll find the roof quite solid. Uncle Charles lived all his life in Corbie House until his health forced him to move two years ago. Besides, I've wired ahead to the caretaker to have things ready for us."

I DROWSED the rest of the way until the train pulled into Langham. The station was not an impressive one, but the village which lay just beyond, its central street running in a curious ellipse, looked quite cheerful with its many lights gleaming through the mist. The caretaker was there to meet us, a heavyset Lancashireman, seemingly as old as his car.

He greeted us in a dull toneless voice and offered no further comment during the half hour's ride that followed. In the darkness with only the dim lights from the old car to light the twisting road, I saw no landmarks to touch a responsive chord in my memory. There were ugly drainage ditches where I had expected stately columns of trees, and rough granite outcroppings where I had pictured broad fields and meadows. Still, almost thirty years had passed since I had been here, and childhood recollections I knew, were apt to be fleeting. Then the car drew up, and the driver said shortly, "Here we are, sir. Corbie House."

The manor house, however, was much as I remembered it: a quadrangular structure of mixed Tudor and Jacobean architecture, with mullioned windows, octagonal towers, and fantastic chimneys. Those chimneys—the correct counting of which had always bedeviled me as a youngster—seemed to stand even higher now, outlined as they were against the grey-black sky.

Inside, the walls were all paneled in the Gothic style, and the ceilings presented some fine examples of Florentine and Siennese fresco painting, which apparently had dulled but little in the more than four centuries that had passed. There was dust in some of the darker corners, and a pile of furniture jackets near the doorway showed that the place had been given a hasty and desultory cleaning.

Memories came flooding down upon me as we passed through the silent rooms. I was glad to see that Uncle Charles, while maintaining to a remarkable degree the period authenticity of the structure, had not hesitated to install modern conveniences. There were electric lights, baths with showers, and even a telephone.

Debora had scarcely time to select one of the smaller chambers for our room when a ring at the bell announced a visitor. He rushed in almost as I turned the latch, seized my hand and began pumping it up and down.

"I'm Eldridge," he said breezily. "Dennison Eldridge. Live in the village, you know. Your caretaker told me you were coming down. Awfully glad. I shouldn't have barged in on you before you had a chance to settle, I know. But I'm so very much interested in this house I just had to."

HE WAS a tall gangly man of about thirty with receding mouse-colored hair and a cleft chin. His eyes avoided my gaze in the nervous way some persons have, and noting this, I put him down as an introvert of the first water. A rather unstable fellow too, I judged, for what other would choose such a time for a call.

"Yes," he went on, "this house has been a hobby of mine for more than a year. Your Uncle Charles didn't care for the idea, though. Testy old gentleman."

I was a little short with Eldridge, but for politeness sake I did ask him what in particular interested him about this house. At that, he looked at me over the match with which he was lighting his pipe, until the flame touched his fingertips.

"You mean you don't know?" he said slowly.

"Know what?"

Quickly he lit another match. "Oh nothing in particular. A few legends, some old wives' tales. I'll tell you about them sometime."

But there was an odd look in his eyes as a quarter of an hour later he took up his tweed cap and went out the door.

"I'll be back in a day or so," he said. "And I shall probably be rather a pest from then on."

He went swinging off into the rainy darkness accompanied by the caretaker. I had asked the latter to stay on as a servant, for a time at least, but the man had quietly refused, explaining that he had other duties.

Our first night in the manor was thus spent alone. Debora and I retired early, but I lay awake for hours as usual, unable to court sleep. I wondered if this change of environment would be of benefit to my wife. Her attitude of mind had concerned me during recent months. It was not so much the things she did as it was her failure to concord with me in the conception of things we both saw. There was the matter of the button on my waistcoat, for one thing. It was forever turning bluish in color, probably from the effects of a cheap dye. But she would insist with an odd strained sort of insistence that it was the same as the others.

Finally I dropped off, only to awaken suddenly just before dawn. The manor was steeped in silence, and the only sound was the rapid ticking of Debora's traveling-clock. The night breeze billowed inward the drapes of the open casement.

For several moments I lay there, wide awake and unmoving. Then I got up, put on a pair of slippers and paced to the window. Below, the grounds were tesselated in shadow and, save for a distant croaking of frogs, a deep hush lay over the countryside. But although the house was silent now, the impression persisted that I had been awakened by a cry from somewhere in the recesses of these halls. And though I had no way of being sure, I was certain that that cry had been a woman's scream.

THE following morning I called London and made arrangements to have three servants sent to Corbie House. The agency promised to have a cook, a serving maid, and a general man at the manor by nightfall. This done, I proceeded to make a survey of the grounds.

They were in a wild and neglected state. On the south side the one-time broad lawn was overrun with gorse, and here stood the remnants of a large three-tier fountain. Scattered about were a dozen or more statues. Most of these images were in a state of decay; heads were missing on some; on others arms and legs had broken off; and all were crude likenesses of Roman deities. Their presence puzzled me, for although the manor might conceivably have been erected on Roman ruins, it was, of course, impossible to believe these images dated to such a remote period. Leading away from the fountain was a double row of tall stately columns. Each of these had been surmounted by a stone corbie, but the majority of the bird images had long ago fallen from their perches and lay shattered and half buried in the rank undergrowth.

Shortly before noon I came upon a large door opening into the side wall. I stood staring at it, a huge barrier constructed of weathered bronze, with great hand-hammered hinges. On either panel was carved a life-size corbie, entwined with what was apparently mistletoe, and in the center, partially obliterated, was a small death's head. The door was a full inch smaller than its frame, suggesting that it had been taken from some other part of the house and mounted here as a makeshift.

I opened it. Before me stretched two narrow passages, both curving inward toward a common center and fashioned of very old stone. I switched on a pocket flash and entered the right hand passage. Sixty steps, and I was back where I had started. The two corridors were nothing more than a complete circle, beginning and ending at the door.

There seemed no reason for such a passage. But as I stood there, gazing back at it, I caught myself growing tense again. It was fancy, of course, nothing more; yet for an instant I thought I had heard from far off the wavering cry of a woman in mortal agony.

When I returned to the house I found Debora in an uneasy state. She had spent the morning dusting and rearranging the

furniture of some of the lower floor rooms. In the library she had glanced at several books, all of which were furnished in rich and costly bindings, and had read passages from a number of them.

"Robert," she said slowly, "these books are evil. We must get rid of them."

Macabre in subject matter, they certainly were. There was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence,* Herzog's *Furchtbare Kulte,* an incomplete and heavily expurgated edition of de Korlette's *Cultes des Goules,* and several bound manuscripts which apparently were journals of the various masters of Corbie House. I saw then that it was these last that had disturbed Debora. Not journals in the true sense, but a series of badly-scrawled essays, all of them seemed to deal with a history of the Druids and the black rites of Druidic worship.

These essays began prosaicly enough, but led into descriptions of the horrible sacrifices and pagan acts committed by the ancient Celts in pre-Norman conquest days. There were narratives so involved and so filled with festering horror I was led to believe the writers had not limited themselves to fact, but had set down the vagaries of what were undoubtedly diseased minds. This puzzled me somewhat, for though I knew practically nothing of Uncle Charlie's side of the family, neither was I aware of any mental variances on the part of his ancestors.

I returned the volumes to the shelves and sought to soothe my wife. At two p.m. the servants arrived. There were two instead of the three I had ordered. The man, a taciturn Scot of middle age, had apparently seen better days. The woman appeared efficient enough, but seemed emotionally disturbed over something.

DINNER that night was a rather unpleasant affair. The woman grumbled at being asked to start work before "she was decently settled;" and the man interrupted us rudely to demand he be given a different room, though for the life of me I could see nothing wrong with the one he had. My wife complained of a headache and retired early, but I chose to stay up a while and read. I made the rounds of the lower floor rooms, locking the doors and securing the casements. I drank a glass of peach brandy which I had brought down from London and which for many years had been my favorite nightcap. Then I went into the library.

I chose Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* as a sleep tempter. For two chapters I read along, puffing a pipe, vaguely aware that I was becoming drowsy. Then my pipe went out, and I laid the book down to refill it. Suddeny I paused, listening. Save for the slow and methodical ticking of a pendulum clock somewhere, the great house was blanketed in silence. And yet again I had the impression that far off, at the limit of my hearing range, I had heard a woman's scream.

My first thought was for Debora. I went to her room, but a glance at the heavy canopied bed showed her sleeping peacefully. I returned to the library and heard it again even as I stepped through the doorway. Not imagination this time, but a definite cry that came from somewhere without the house. I let myself out into the grounds, headed slowly across the wet flagstones in the direction of the ruined fountain. The rain had ceased, but a strong gusty wind still tossed the branches of the oak trees. Up in the eastern sky a full moon was scudding through the cloud wrack.

Presently I came upon the door, the presence of which had so puzzled me earlier in the day. It was open, though I remembered closing it when I left the circular passage. I moved to shut it, but even as my hand touched the ancient latch, a strange sensation stole over me. It was as though another will took control of my own and drew me forward into that passage. Like a sleepwalker I found myself traversing the sixty steps, then emerging at the door again.

There I halted, staring. The scene before me was changed. No longer was the fountain a ruined ornament; it was a huge cromlech now, formed of two mighty slabs of stone resting horizontally, one upon the other. The statues were all restored, and in the moonlight their features were clear and sharp in detail. At my side the manor house wall was smooth and even, without trace of ivy or lichen, and beyond, the aisle of corbie columns seemed to have doubled its length, with the stone birds all on their perches. The weeds and underbrush too had given

away to a smooth expanse of short cropped sward. Somewhere, rising and falling on the wind, the deep pealing of a bell reached my ears.

But the lure, the strange spell I had experienced on passing through the door still remained. Like a mental cloud, it blanketed all emotions save one, and that was the irresistible desire to move toward its source, which now seemed to emanate from the center of the aisle of columns. I paced forward, a step at a time, crossed the wide lawn. Black and curiously repelling in the moonlight, the stone corbies faced each other from their high mounts, their wings outspread, their beaks open, their eyes fixed on me. I had reached approximately the center of that aisle when abruptly I halted, aware in an uncertain way that I was being followed.

A shapeless mass of darker shadows swam into my vision then. The shadows resolved themselves into a procession of cowled figures moving slowly across the grounds toward me. Like a funeral cortege, with measured step, they advanced, and as they drew nearer it seemed that a man and woman were in the lead. All was vague and indistinct like a scene viewed through water, yet I saw the man was bearded with a stern countenance and that he wore a brocaded jerkin over which was thrown a slashed tunic, girded at the waist by a jeweled belt from which hung a dagger. There were ruffles at his wrists, and his waistfront was ornamented with Spanish blackwork. The woman I could see even less distinctly, but her head was bowed low, and she wore a gable headdress, the lappet of which was edged with gold. There was something familiar about the woman, perhaps her hair which was copper-colored like Debora's.

Past me, without notice of my presence, the procession moved. That strange lure was almost overwhelming now, drawing me after them. We emerged from the corbie aisle, crossed a second expanse of sward, and began to climb a low rise, following a vague path. We entered a wood, swathed in gloom where the huge oak trees seemed to arrange themselves in corridors and galleries. I heard the bell again, and it was much nearer, coming apparently from a point just ahead. Abruptly the trees fell away into a circular glade. In the center was a large flat stone, the top and sides of which were covered with dark stains.

And now the cowled figures grouped themselves in a circle and began to sway gently from side to side until the entire throng was writhing in a fantastic dance. The scene seemed to shift and waver, now clear in detail, now blurred and shadowy like a negative seen alternately through bright and dim light. The man in the jerkin dragged the woman forward, prostrated himself before the stone and began to mumble an incantation. His voice was deep-pitched and resonant, yet it seemed to reach my ears from far off, as if it had crossed vast leagues of space.

ON and on his voice droned. The cowled figures took up the litany, and the chanting rose louder and louder. All this time I had stood there, transfixed. Now as through the dimness I saw the man thrust the woman into an oval of moonlight and jerk the dagger from his belt I sought to cry out and lunge forward. But my feet were dead things, anchored to the earth, and my throat seemed constricted.

A saffron-colored light appeared over the top surface of the stone. It coalesced slowly, leaving a film of radiance like a gauze curtain hanging there stationary. An instant later behind that film a squat bestial *Thing* crouched, leering down at the assembled throng. Like a multiple-headed gigantic toad, its cavernous mouths opened and closed, its lidless eyes reflecting all the evil that has confronted man from primordial times. As I gazed upon that abysmal entity evoked by that unholy incantation, stark horror seared deep into my soul.

The moonlight fell away and a great dark cloud blackened the heavens. Then the wind and the rain were upon me. Lightning flashes alternately etched the glade in blinding brilliance and pitch darkness.

By the light of those flashes I saw the man in the jerkin throw up his arms toward the thing on the stone in supplication. Grasping the woman by the hair, he plunged the dagger into her throat. The blood gouted outwards as she reeled back and crumpled to the ground. All was vague and uncertain in the intermittent light, possessing a nightmarish quality of unreality—all save the

monstrous toad-like *Thing* which crouched on the stone slab. It slid down from the stone, groveled toward the woman, opening its multiple mouths.

Then the spell that held me was broken, and I turned and ran. I ran through the woods, down the aisle of corbie columns, black horror engulfing me. Not until I reached the fountain did I draw up, heart pounding, gasping for breath.

Oblivious to the torrents of rain I stood there in a kind of stupor, clutching the ancient stonework for support. As my heart slowly quieted, a hundred unanswerable questions crowded down upon me.

I turned to head for the house. But at that instant over the rolling of the thunder, a sharp pistol-like report sounded high above. A terrific weight descended upon my skull, and I felt myself going down into unconsciousness.

WHEN I opened my eyes, I was lying in bed, and Debora was bathing my wrists and brow with a wet cloth. Sunlight streamed through the Gothic windows.

"What happened?" I said, conscious of a dull ache in the back of my head.

She gave me a reassuring smile. "Nothing that won't mend, Robert, thank heaven. One of the oak-tree branches broke off during the storm and fell on you. Luckily my window was open, and I heard you cry out. But what were you doing on the grounds at that hour?"

All the horror of the preceding night came welling back to me, and for a moment I lay there without reply. Then, convincingly as I could, I explained that I had gone out to investigate an unusual sound, hoping that the matter would end there.

The matter didn't end there, however. By noon I felt sufficiently recovered to leave my bed, and, still a little shaky, continued the survey of my new possessions. I went down the wide, dark halls, examining carefully each room and anteroom, cataloguing in a little notebook each outstanding piece of furniture and exceptional piece of bric-a-brac that took my fancy, estimating their value and guessing at their age and origin. In this fashion I came upon a narrow rectangular room, opening off a short corridor which I somehow had overlooked, and entering it I saw at once that my inheritance was far richer than I had supposed it to be. The walls of this room were almost covered with large portraits in oil, each of which was the work of a master and worth a fabulous amount. There were several Memlings, Ghirlandaios, Carpaccios, a Raphael which might or might not have been authentic, and one or two Holbeins.

It was before a larger portrait that I stopped to stare with an incredulous eye. The nameplate read: *Portrait of Sir Edward Corbie, First Baronet Langham.* I had known, of course, that the line of the family originally owning the manor had been named Corbie, or as it was variously spelled, Corbee or Corbey. But what so disturbed me was this: Beyond a shadow of a doubt the figure in the painting was the man in the jerkin I had followed into the glade the night before.

Late that afternoon I went out into the grounds and saw the tree branch that had fallen upon me. It was a gnarled, massive length of wood, and the wonder was I hadn't been killed. High above, the splintered end showed where it had been twisted from the tree. I moved past the old fountain until I found myself once again before the corbie door. But the door was a dull, prosaic thing in the light of day. Even the mistletoe and the corbies carved upon it seemed unimaginatively crude. Nor did the passage reveal anything more.

Yet, curiously, an idle thought persisted in my mind. As a child I had accompanied my father on several occasions to an amusement park near Tilborn, and I recall how the tram car stopped just above a large culvert and the passengers all walked down a flight of steps to enter the park through the culvert archway. From the window of the car I could see the sea, the shore and the bright, painted buildings. Then, after descending the stairs, I saw that same scene as I passed through the archway. But, childlike, I never would believe that it was the *same* scene. I was sure there were two seashores, and two amusement parks, one above and one below, and for me the upper one began to take on a kind of magical quality all its own.

Could I apply the same reasoning here? Could there be two manor grounds, one per-

haps in a different plane, and did that corbie door stand as an entrance between them?

THAT evening Dennison Eldridge called again. He carried a small camera and several flash bulbs, and he asked to see the library "first," apparently assuming I had given my consent to his inspection of the entire house.

He took several pictures of the library, then moved across to the book shelves and ran his eye up and down the titles. But apparently he didn't find what he was looking for, for after a moment he turned to me.

"I happen to know your Uncle Charles never used this room," he said. "Avoided it like the plague. He threw out some of the books, too."

"They're not a very cheerful lot," I agreed.

Eldridge tamped tobacco in his pipe and lit it slowly. "Most of the books he cast out were destroyed," he said. "But a number of them found their way into the village, and I was lucky enough to get my hands on one of them for a short time. The rest of them are . . . unobtainable." He puffed in silence a moment, then crossed to a chair and slumped into it.

"Let me give you a little history of this house as I have pieced it together," he said. A glitter had entered his eyes now, and his hands trembled perceptibly. "It begins as far as I can determine in the year 1507 at the close of the reign of Henry VII. Edward Corbie had fought at Bosworth Field, supporting Richard III. Upon Richard's death, Corbie moved here to Langham and threw his will and fortune into the building of the manor to honor his marriage to Elizabeth Beaufort, who, ironically enough, was a direct descendent of John of Gaunt.

"According to the more or less muddled chronicles which have come down, Elizabeth pleaded with her husband not to build on this site. There was something about the grove of oak trees that oppressed her. Corbie, however, laughed at her fears and went ahead with the construction, even sending to France for some of the stained glass windows.

"In 1507 a visitor to the manor, after dining alone with Corbie, asked to see his wife. The Master, who was quite drunk at the time, led his guest to a stone crypt in the park and opened a door carved with the likeness of two corbies. Inside the guest beheld a hideous sight.

"There was the woman, Elizabeth, propped up in a chair, her body enveloped in a heavy cloak, her face hidden by her long undone hair. But the wind from the open door blew the hair to one side to reveal the putrefaction of death, and the cloak dropped down from the left breast, showing a horrible wound where the heart had been literally torn from the body.

"From there on, the account becomes vague. One part has it that Edward Corbie was taken to Newgate Prison where he died shortly. Another declares 'that it was recognized his soul was taken over by devils,' and that he was 'left alone with his own knowledge of evil and self torment.' Anyway, it isn't a pleasant tale."

"No," I replied, "it isn't. But neither is it worse than the background of a great many houses I'm familiar with. Practically no historical landmark in England is complete without at least one or more ghosts of the past."

All the same I felt the cloud of foreboding thicken about me.

Eldridge shrugged. "I've told you only the beginning, the initial crime," he said. "The rest you can dig up for yourself, if you have better luck than I."

He took his leave a short time later. At the door, however, he hesitated.

"I spoke of a crypt with an oddly designed door," he said, "supposedly in the grounds somewhere. The thing's probably long since been destroyed, but if it isn't, I should . . . well, I should avoid it if I were you."

THE blow on the head had taken more of my strength than I realized, and I decided to retire early. Climbing up the grand staircase to our second floor bedroom, I counted the rungs of the balustrade as is my custom, but halfway to the top, lost count, and had to go down and start over again. Again I lay awake for hours, tossing restlessly. The corbie door persisted in my thoughts; it seemed to lure me with all the drawing power of a lodestone. What, I

wondered, did Eldridge know about that door that he had seen fit to warn me away from it. And what was in those books my uncle had thrown out of his library?

I fell asleep at length but awoke at a quarter of two. The bed at my side was empty; Debora was gone! For several moments I lay there, listening. Then I got up, opened the door and went out into the corridor. A single orchid-shaded night-light burned at the far end, partially illuminating the grand staircase. At the top of the stairs, leaning lightly against the top post of the balustrade, stood a woman, her back turned toward me. But as I looked, I saw that it was not Debora. She had copper-colored hair, the same as my wife's, and she was of the same height with the same general contours of figure. But it was not Debora! I knew this as a man knows a familiar object in the dark. In utter silence she stood there, as if waiting for something. Then, even as I took a step forward, she began to descend.

She had reached a point halfway down when I gained the head of the stairs. And then a strange thing happened. The woman seemed to fade away into nothingness. One moment she was there; the next, she had disappeared utterly. Yet as I stood there, a great inward chill swept up my spine. For in the dust which still lay thick on the steps I could see her footprints continue to descend, one after another!

Control left me then. I uttered a cry and ran down to the library. It was empty. I burst through the connecting doorway into the assembly chamber. Five feet away Debora, a lavender-colored robe over her nightdress, drew up short with a startled exclamation.

"Why, Robert," she said, "what's wrong?"

"What are you doing here?" I demanded.

She laughed. "You forgot to latch the garden door. It was banging in the wind, and I went down to fasten it, that's all."

"And you weren't on the staircase a moment ago?" I persisted. My pulse was still racing from what I had seen.

She laughed again. "Of course I was. I came directly down here. Come, Robert, go to bed. You're not awake yet."

Early next morning, immediately after breakfast, I slipped on an old sweater for the weather had turned suddenly cold, and set out for Langham. Without a plan but with a strong curiosity prompted by Eldridge's reference to "books still in the village," I headed down the old lane, facing a strong southwest wind. For the first time I had opportunity to examine the surrounding countryside, and I confess it impressed me anything but favorably. The road itself was a twisting strip of mire and jagged holes; bridges were rotting and sadly in need of repair; and the heath that stretched away on all sides waved its grasses in a way that resembled the slow undulations of a forlorn sea.

The few cottages and houses that were visible from the road were tumble-down affairs, many of them without paint, most of them with their hedging gone rank and untrimmed. One thing struck me as rather odd. None of them had windows opening to the north; that is in the direction of the manor. But then of course the winds must be bitter sweeping across this open expanse during the cold months.

ARRIVING in the village, I chose the pub as a likely initial source of information. At that hour the place was deserted, save for one man talking with the tavernkeeper. He was a red-faced man with a toothbrush mustache who eyed me suspiciously when I offered a few idle comments on the weather. But when, by way of introduction, I swung the conversation around to the manor, he suddenly placed his glass of ale down on the counter and faced me deliberately.

"You'll be the new master of Corbie House," he said.

I nodded. "Perhaps you can help me," I said. "I understand a number of books from the manor library have found their way into the village. Do you know who has them?"

The man shook his head violently. "I know nothing at all about Corbie House," he said. "Nothing at all. With hands that trembled, he fumbled for a coin, flung it on the bar and hurried out.

Unfriendly fellow, I thought. Evidently the manor, standing as the mark of ancient overlordship, was still the object of some

resentment here. But an hour later I was more puzzled than I cared to admit.

Though I had spoken to a dozen villagers and though in most cases I had been politely received, the moment I mentioned the manor or the books which were the object of my search, conversation came to a sudden embarrassing halt. Now, as I passed down the street, I was aware of eyes turned furtively in my direction, of groups gathering in doorways to whisper audibly after I had gone. I was a stranger, of course, and the attitude may have been the usual one accorded newcomers who sought to pry into what were deemed private affairs. But somehow I could not accept that reasoning.

I came to the vicarage at length and found the vicar in; a rather youngish man with a skull quite bald and kindly yet penetrating eyes. We smoked our pipes together with some of his strong shag-cut tobacco, chatting pleasantly. Abruptly I came to the point.

"What is wrong with Corbie House?" I asked.

He looked at me in silence. If my question startled him, his face didn't reveal it. "Wrong?" he repeated at length.

"Yes," I said, "wrong. I've been trying to locate several volumes which I understand contain a history, or partial history, of the manor and which I have reason to believe are somewhere in Langham. But I may as well have been asking for the moon for all the response I've got. Is the past of the manor so unpleasant then that . . .?"

"Pleasantness is hardly a quality which enters into it," the vicar said. He seemed fighting two emotions, a simultaneous desire and reluctance to talk. His gray eyes winked nervously several times, and, laying down his pipe, he ran his left hand over his smooth pate.

"I have the books you mentioned," he said. "There are two of them and a part of a third. They came to me as part of the possessions of my predecessor, and they were placed in his hands by your Uncle Charles when he first took possession of the manor. I might say that a Mr. Dennison Eldridge who lives in the village has on several occasions requested permission to see them, but of course I refused."

"Why?" I demanded. In the cheerless house that this was, the cloud of foreboding was slowly returning to gather about me.

THE vicar shifted in his chair uneasily. "Your Uncle Charles left certain implicit instructions concerning their removal," he said. "It seems that two of the books are identical. One of them is to be retained here in this house; the other is to be turned over to the new master of the manor upon his request. When read, they are to be read at the same hour, separately. That is, as I understand it, we are to agree on a certain time, and I am then to read one copy here, and presumably you the other at Corbie House. Your Uncle Charles was very emphatic about this."

"But why?" I said again.

He shook his head. "I don't know. The books have been packed away in two boxes —they're in my garret—and I have never seen fit to disregard the instructions. I would suggest, however, that you deliberate the matter carefully before. . . ."

"No," I interrupted stubbornly. "I want them now." All this vague talk about secret books was beginning to irritate me and at the same time arouse in me a mounting sense of unease.

The vicar left the room. I heard him mounting the stairs and a moment later the sounds of fumbling about overhead. He returned presently, carrying two small flat boxes made of wood and equipped with staples and padlocks. One of them, slightly larger, bore a penciled cross on its cover.

"This is the box that is to remain with me," the vicar said, and his voice sounded strained. "It apparently contains the uncompleted book as well as the duplicate in your box. I shall read this or not according to your wishes. Now for the time element. Shall we say two hours from now? That will give you ample time to return to the manor."

I agreed hastily, and I also told him he had my permission to read the uncompleted book. At the door the vicar seized my hand and shook it heavily.

"I don't suppose you would reconsider," he said. "I don't suppose you would, as the saying goes, let sleeping dogs lie?"

But I shook my head, and after thanking

him, set off rapidly. The return to the manor seemed endless, but I found the vicar's time estimate to be accurate, for the clock was just striking as I entered the door. I found then that the vicar had forgotten to give me a key, and I was forced to wait, fuming with impatience, while the manservant located an iron bar stout enough to force the hasp.

Inside was a comparatively small book bound with covers, waxed oak wood, with iron hinges but without a title. It was a curious volume. Some of the pages were hand-printed, with the margins ornate with colored designs and what appeared to be cabalistic symbols. Other pages had been carefully written in a fine spidery hand; while the last section was blurred and almost undecipherable, as if it had been immersed in water.

Opening a page at random, my eyes fastened on a passage which I read several times:

> ". . . the crypt stoode not far from the house on a little knoll and was surrounded by seven mightie oak trees. It was built of stone and opened by a strange and unusual door, bearing the likeness of corbies, framed by sprigs of mistletoe, and having in the center the design of a death's head."

FOR an hour I read, a powerful magnifying glass aiding me. At the end of that time I sat back with a low exclamation. The history of the Corbie family was a black one, and doom seemed to have stalked the female line down through the generations.

In 1548 Rupert Corbie was credited with having murdered his own daughter. Here again there was mention of the door of the crypt, "where the girl had been properly entombed, only to have her body disappear three days later."

Mary, wife of James Corbie, was found dead in bed when her husband returned from a hunting party with Charles I. Her skull was crushed, and the mark of a cloven hoof was said to be upon her brow.

Lenoire Corbie alone had outlived her husband, but her death in 1714 was surrounded by mysterious circumstances. Accused of being slightly mad, she was accustomed to walk at night in the manor grounds. The crypt at that time had long since been destroyed; only the door remained, standing alone and forlorn in the midst of the oak trees. On the night of her death the villagers in Langham reported a strange light in the sky in the direction of the manor park, and one peasant ran breathless into the town to tell of a procession of cowled figures marching through the wood. Lenoire Corbie was found sprawled before the crypt door, hand outstretched, as if her last dying movement had been to thrust it open, though this action was incomprehensible, for as the writer said, "she could have simply walked around it."

The last section of the book seemed to have been written by another person, perhaps at an earlier date, and was in such bad condition that I could decipher none of it. All in all, it was a strange volume, but hardly one, I thought, that necessitated a simultaneous reading by two persons.

And then I turned to the last page. Printed here in curious stilted letters in a solution that looked more like blood than ink, was the inscription:

> *Pass not the portals of the door with the corbies, or heaven help ye, ye shall lose thy soul!*

The rest of the day was one of misery for me. For one thing, the wound on my head was not healing the way it should, and I regretted not visiting the local physician while I was in Langham. It felt feverish with the sensation of a pulse in it, and in a vague way it seemed to be effecting my vision. A wind-swept rain came up again in late afternoon, confining me to the house, and the view of the lowering sky through the library windows was a depressing one. But most significant of all was the lure of the corbie door. Whether or not it was a psychological paradox, the result of the many warnings I had received or read, I did not know, but the door remained in my mind's eye constantly. It drew me, it attracted me until I felt I would go mad if I could not pass through it again.

That night after Debora had retired I sat again in the library. I read for a while,

but time dragged past. Then about midnight a low sobbing reached my ears. I went to the door and listened. The rain had passed on and the sky was clear, but water still murmured in the roof's runnels. The wind blew from the southwest, and it carried the sound with it. There was something unearthly about that sobbing; the owner of the voice seemed in deepest despair, and I felt a slow chill sweep over me.

In the grounds I headed straight for the corbie door, found it open as I had told myself it would be. I entered the black passage and completed the circle.

Again I found myself in a borderland world!

The night was a repetition of the night before. Once more I saw that silent procession of cowled figures and drawn by that strange lure, I followed them into the glade. A man and a woman in mid-seventeenth century dress were in the lead. Again all was vague and shadowy, but the woman was the same tall, full-bosomed woman with copper-colored hair and hazel eyes so strangely like Debora.

The fantastic dance, the horrible rites followed like a cinema film which has been run a second time. The man drew forth a knife, and hideous and nauseating, the beast that was not a beast took form on the slab. Through the dimness I watched it rear its evil head, waiting for that moment when the knife would strike. The woman screamed and fell.

And then a sea of darkness washed over me, blotting out the scene. There was a sensation of reeling earth and a great roaring, and then somehow I was stumbling out of the black woods toward the manor.

AT TEN o'clock next morning Dennison Eldridge was ushered by the woman servant into the library. He was hatless, and his face was drawn and haggard. He threw a question at me before I had a chance to speak.

"Did you see the vicar yesterday?" he demanded.

"Why, yes," I replied, "I did. But . . ."

"And did you make arrangements with him to open those books that once belonged to your Uncle Charles? The books, two copies of which were supposed to be read at the same time?"

"I don't quite see what business it is . . ."

"Did you?" he persisted.

I nodded, staring at him in perplexity.

Eldridge lowered himself into a chair with a low moan. "God forgive me," he said. "I should have warned you."

I was conscious of a growing uneasiness as I waited for him to explain.

"The vicar," Eldridge said at length, "was found unconscious on the floor of his study. In his fireplace were the charred remnants of printed pages. Oh, he wasn't harmed physically," he went on. "He couldn't be, you know. But his mind . . ." Eldridge spread his hands, and his eyelids drooped wearily, "his mind is completely gone."

"But why. . . .?" I said.

"The Langham doctor said he might recover in a long time. He also said the vicar was suffering from a severe mental shock. Probably that's nearer the truth than he imagined. We shall never know what was in that second book. . . . But you, sir, couldn't you close up this place and move back to London? Couldn't you?"

SIX days passed. They were days of horror, of bewilderment, of fear for my sanity. Thus far, thank heaven, I had been able to keep the truth from Debora, though I was sure she was beginning to suspect something was wrong. But my life in the manor had centered down to anticipation during the daylight hours—anticipation for the unknown—and mental struggle each night to fight off the lure of the corbie door.

Six times I had entered the passage opened by that door, traversed the sixty steps, and found myself in a borderland world. The first and second night I took this action to investigate a woman's cry I thought I had heard. But after that I was drawn by a psychic power. It was as if a lorelei lurked beyond that door, calling out to me in a command that would not be denied.

Six times I have followed a man and a woman with copper-colored hair strangely resembling Debora into the glade in the wood. The vision was always the same.

First the writhing dance of the cowled figures, then the incantation, then the materialization of the beast-Thing on the stone slab, and finally, hideous and terrifying, the sacrifice.

The stark horror lay in the fact that I knew in advance each detail that was going to happen and that I was powerless to prevent it.

In the light of these developments, I phoned the mason in Langham, asking him to come to the manor immediately. If I could not resist the lure of the corbie door by strength of will alone, I meant to seal its entrance forever. But the man was vague in his replies, promising only that he would "do what he could."

The day of the twenty-eighth of June was a day of somber skies and humid heat. At six o'clock Debora and I ate our evening meal, and I called her attention again to the button on my waistcoat which once more had turned blue in color.

"I see nothing wrong with it, Robert," she said with her maddening insistence. Then she added inanely, "Are you feeling quite well?"

At seven o'clock I began to feel the attraction of the corbie door, and I phoned the Langham mason again. But although I let the instrument ring repeatedly, there was no answer. By eight the strange lure was upon me like a mental cloud. I climbed the grand staircase and entered a room on the south side of the third floor. This room I had discovered was fitted with three large windows in the form of an alcove. By looking diagonally out of the middle window I found I could obtain a clear and unobstructed view of the corbie door. I remained there an hour in utter darkness, staring down at the vague rectangular shape of the door. Nameless terror was slowly closing in on me.

Shortly after eleven Debora laid aside her needlework and went to her room. Ten minutes later found me in the library pacing back and forth restlessly before the book-lined walls. An expectant hush had settled over the manor.

Midnight came and passed, and the great house lay steeped in silence. I slumped into a chair and began to reason with myself. Tomorrow the masons would surely be here, and the door and the passage would be walled up forever. Could I go on after that, always wondering whether I actually had seen those visions or whether they were some quirk of my imagination? Did I dare trust my sanity in future months, always with the knowledge that I had been on the brink of the unknown? Stay away, an inner voice told me, avoid that door like the plague. It was Eldridge's voice as I remembered his warning of a few nights before.

For an hour I sat there, brain in a turmoil, my palms moist with cold perspiration. Then at one o'clock I got up and strode deliberately into the grounds. Once more, I told myself feverishly; just once more . . .

I AM back. I have returned to the library from my last and final vision. But vision it is no longer. This time, God help me, I have taken an active part in the tragedy. This time. . . .

It is four in the morning. Even now the hideous details of all that happened are a blur in my memory. Were it not for this blood on my hands and this knife on the table I would swear it was all a dream.

I entered the passage, and I followed the sixty steps to the door again. There in the moonlight I looked upon the statues that were all restored and the fountain that was a cromlech now. There I saw the procession of cowled figures and the woman with the copper-colored hair in the lead.

I followed, *but presently I became aware that it was I who strode at the woman's side, that it was I who grasped her wrist and drew her firmly down the aisle of columns.*

In my hands I felt now the haft of a long-bladed knife, and as we paced through the dark wood into the glade, an alien intellect invaded my own. I looked upon the woman without emotion. I felt only the overpowering desire to see the sacrifice completed, to evoke the beast-Thing, to plunge the knife deep into the woman's vitals.

Yet, though I moved like an automaton, far back in my mind, an awareness of the horror filtered out to me.

Detail for detail the events in the glade were repeated with myself in the role of inquisitor. Then at last the moment came,

and I drove the knife deep into her throat.

I had an instant's glance at my blood-smeared hands. Then with a scream of anguish I turned and ran. How I found my way back to the manor I don't know. I remember running wildly down the aisle of the columns, across the lawn and the flagstones and bursting through the library door. . . .

An hour has passed, and I am still slumped in the chair in that room. A great lassitude and weakness has swept over me, and I have made no attempt to answer the many questions that are seething through my mind. Inside the house I can hear the pendulum clock ticking slowly. Outside, a rising wind is howling around the gables and eaves. . . .

. . . . the wind has just ripped one of the French windows from its hinges and broken it into a thousand fragments. The sound of the crash was tremendous and will bring Debora to this room in a moment.

But the manor is utterly still. There is no sound from Debora's room. No sound at all . . . and that is odd . . .

The July first issue of the London Chronicle carried the following small item at the bottom of its third page:

> Reports of a dual tragedy have reached us today from Corbie House, near Langham-on-Trell. The body of Mr. Robert Fielding was found by servants in the library of the house, following their awakening by the sound of a shot in the early morning hours. Mr. Fielding, who only recently inherited the estate, lay sprawled across a chair, still clutching the revolver with which he had taken his own life.
>
> In the converted bedroom on the second floor the body of Mr. Fielding's wife, Debora, was also found. Her throat had been cruelly slashed with a large kitchen knife.
>
> Yard officials as yet have been unable to supply a motive for the crime or to explain the trail of blood leading from the house to a glade in a nearby wood where the woman was undoubtedly killed.

END

# Castaway

## BY GEORGE WHITLEY

THE water, that at first had been so warm, enveloped him with a cold embrace that tried to contract his muscles, threatened to squeeze the heart itself to a standstill. The salt mouthfuls that he was now swallowing with almost every stroke choked him and seared his lungs. The smarting eyes were blind, no longer staring at the yellow line of beach that, at the beginning of it all, had seemed so close. He no longer knew or cared where he was going, or wondered if he would ever get there. The tired limbs automatically went through their feeble, no longer rhythmic motions—but it was only some part of himself that must always refuse to acknowledge the ultimate defeat.

Perhaps he was already drowning. Perhaps it was only his memory harking back to some happier time, some period when the world contained more than this hopeless wet misery. For it was not the whole of his past life that flashed before his inward eye as a prelude to extinction. It was only the events just prior to his present predicament.

He was walking the bridge, warm in the afternoon sunlight, dry, the heat tempered by the pleasant Pacific breeze. And he was

*Time is a gigantic, circular wall; we are caught forever within its confines*

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

hearing the carefree voices of the day-workers and the watch on deck as, swinging in their bo's'n's chairs, they joyfully slapped the company's peacetime colors, scarlet and black, over the drab, wartime gray of the funnel. They had every right to be cheerful. The war was over. The ammunition with which the holds were packed would no longer be required—and gone was the danger that a torpedo from a prowling submarine would bring the voyage to a premature close.

Fine on the starboard bow was the island. Lazily, he told himself that he would take a four-point bearing, would obtain a distance off and a fix. He went into the chartroom, leafed through the *Pacific Pilot* until he found the right page. He read ". . . when last visited, by Captain Wallis of H.M.S. *Searcher* in 1903, was uninhabited. There are one or two springs, and the water is good. . . ."

Somebody was shouting. He put the book down hastily, went out to the bridge. The men on the funnel were calling and pointing. He looked in the direction they indicated, could not be sure of what he saw, took the telescope from its box.

The island—white surf, yellow beach, green jungle—swam unsteadily in the circular field of the telescope. But there was a fresh color added—a column of thick, brown smoke that billowed up from the beach, thinned to a dense haze against the blue, cloudless sky.

He had called the captain then. The captain had come up, surly at the breaking of his afternoon rest, but immediately alert when he saw the smoke. Some poor devil of an airman, he had said it might be, or survivors of shipwreck or losing battle.

The course was altered at once to bring the island more nearly ahead. In this there was no danger, the soundings ran fantastically deep almost to the thin line of beach itself. And the watch on deck laid aside their paint brushes, busied themselves clearing away the motor launch.

By this time the news had spread through the ship. The other officers came up, stared at the island and its smoke signal through binoculars and telescopes. Some of them said that they could see a little figure beside the fire, dancing and waving. And the captain, after careful examination of the pilot book and of the largest scale chart of the vicinity, was conning his ship in on such an approach that his boat would have the minimum distance to run to the beach, but so that the ship herself would always be in deep water. As additional precautions the echo-sounding recorder was started up and lookouts posted. . . .

And that was the last of his life before this eternity of cold, wet misery, of aching limbs that moved on and on of their own volition when he would willingly have willed them to stop, of blinded, smarting eyes, of throat and lungs burning from the increasingly frequent gulps of salt water.

His bare knees ground on something hard and sharp. The pain of it made him cry out. His hands went down, and he felt sand and coral rocks. He could see now, mistily, and he dragged himself up the beach to where the fire was still burning. And as he collapsed on the sand beside it the fleeting, ironical thought flashed through his bemused brain that now the castaway would have to give aid to one of his would-be rescuers. And that was his last thought until he awoke some hours later.

IT WAS night when he woke up. There was a full moon, so he was able to take stock of his surroundings at once, did not have to go through a period of confused and panic-stricken fumbling in the darkness. Beside him, a black patch on the pale sand, the fire was no more than dead ashes.

There was something missing. At first he could not place it—then suddenly realized that it was the man who had lit the fire. He got shakily to his feet then. Every bone was aching, and the lighter which, wrapped in his tobacco pouch, he always kept in the right-hand pocket of his shorts, had gouged what seemed to be a permanent hole in his hip. He stood there for a while, staring about him. There was nothing to be seen but the pale sand, luminous in the glare of the moon, stretching away on either side of him—that and the sea, smooth, misty blue, and the dark, forbidding trees inland.

He shouted then. At first it was *"Ahoy! Where are you?"*—and then it degenerated into a mere, wordless bellowing. But he

could not keep it up for long. His throat was dry and parched, the natural aftermath of his frequent and copious swallowings of salt water was a raging thirst.

Some memory of boyhood books about castaways on desert islands stirred in his brain. He began to look for footprints. On the further side of what had been the fire he found them. And this evidence that the castaway, the man who had built and lit the fire, did exist was rather frightening. What manner of man could he have been to have fled into the jungle? There was only one answer to that question—*Mad*. Possibly some poor, starved creature whose brain had finally snapped when the rescue ship, striking the floating mine (for that, the sole survivor of the rescue ship had decided, was what must have happened) had disintegrated in flame and thunder. Or, worse, it could be some suicidal, murderous Japanese aviator or seaman, it didn't matter which.

But the footprints must lead somewhere. The man from the ship followed them. A direction was the only information they gave him. They had been made in dry sand and could not tell him anything, not even the size of the feet that had made them.

They ended where the sand stretched for perhaps a hundred feet in wet and glistening contrast to the dry grains on either side of it. This, obviously, was one of the springs of which the *Pilot* had spoken. Inland, among the low trees, there was a shallow channel, a sluggish stream. The man went down on his hands and knees and scooped up a double handful of the water. It was only slightly brackish. He soon tired of this unsatisfactory means of quenching his thirst and plunged his face into the wet coolness. Even so, he restrained himself. He knew of the discomfort that would follow upon too hasty indulgence. He rose to a sitting posture and rested. Then, after a while, he drank again.

When he had finished he felt better. Automatically his hand went to his pocket for his pipe. It was not there. He tried to remember where he had left it. He forced his memory back, step by step, until it rewarded his persistence with a picture of the briar being placed on top of the flag locker in the wheelhouse. He swore softly. The pouch in the right-hand pocket of his shorts was more than half full. He took it out, opened it, ran his fingers through the tobacco that, in spite of his long swim, had remained dry. The lighter was dry too. At the first flick of the little wheel the flame sprang into being. He blew it out hastily. He could not afford to waste fuel. Fire might well be his most treasured possession. He remembered, then, the fire that the other castaway had lit. He remembered, with something of a shock, the other castaway.

The vision of the murderous little Japanese had now receded. He knew that whilst he had been drinking at the stream, he had laid himself open to attack, and the attack had not come. His first theory must be right; that of the poor, half-starved, half-crazed creature who had fled into the jungle at the sight and sound of the explosion.

Slowly, limping a little with the pain of his gashed knees, his aching bones and muscles, he made his way back to the ashes of the fire. He sat down beside them, intending to stay awake until daylight in case the other unwilling inhabitant of the island should return. And he fell asleep almost at once.

AT HIS second awakening the sun was well up. It was the heat that prodded him into wakefulness. When he climbed stiffly to his feet he found that his clothing was stiff and prickly, was glittering with the crystals of dry salt.

He hoped wildly that the firemaker would have returned during the night. But the beach was still empty. So was the sea. That was to be expected. The island was miles from the usual peacetime tracks. It was only adherence to an Admiralty route that had brought his vessel within sight of it. Still he stared at the sea, praying that at least one of his shipmates might have survived the mysterious loss of the ship. But there was nothing. Not even a hatch or a grating, raft or lifebuoy.

Food was now a matter of some urgency. He looked inland to where a few cocoanut palms waved feathery fronds across the blue sky, decided that an assault upon them could wait until he had quenched his thirst. By the time he had reached the stream the discomfort of an itching skin was greater than

that of an empty belly. So, having drunk his fill, he stripped off his shorts and shirt and rinsed them thoroughly in the fresh water. He spread them on a convenient tree to dry in the sun. He took off his light canvas shoes and rinsed them too. And he splashed for a while in the shallows and then sat, half in sunlight, half in shadow, to wait for his clothing to dry.

It was still a little damp when he put it on. He hesitated before returning his pouch and the precious lighter to his pocket, then told himself that if it had survived a swim surely it would not be harmed by a temporary dampness. And he was anxious to strike inland in search of something edible and—although this was fast becoming relegated to the back of his mind—the other castaway.

The undergrowth was heavily matted, and the bed of the stream offered the best approach to the interior of the island. As he splashed inland he looked about him for anything that would serve as food. But everything was unfamiliar. Then, after a sweating half hour or so, the loneliness of it all became oppressive. He was looking less for something to eat than signs of companionship. Often he would pause and stand there, listening, but apart from the low ripple of the stream over its rocky bed there was no sound.

Panic came then. He started to run, slipping and stumbling over the waterworn rocks. And he almost missed the ship. He was already past it when a belated message from his optic nerves made him stop suddenly, turn and retrace his steps. And the ship was too big to miss. He stood for long minutes staring at it, wondering how a contraption so huge and so outlandish could have found its way into the middle of the jungle.

It stood besides the stream, in the middle of a little clearing. It had been there for a long time. The metal of which it was built was dulled by age. Creepers from the growth all around it had evidently tried to find purchase on the smooth plating, but, with the exception of those around a ladder extending from a circular door or port to the ground, had failed.

And as the man stared he began to see something familiar about the strange construction. It was like, although on a far vaster scale, the V-2 rockets used by Germany in World War II. Its streamlined body stood upright, balanced upon four huge vanes. There were ports in its sides. And its nose, towering many feet above the trees, was what an airman would call a "greenhouse."

The man shouted.

There might be somebody in the ship.

There *must* be somebody in the ship—the man who had made the fire.

He shouted again: "Ahoy! Is anybody . . ."

And he broke off in mid sentence.

*Was it a man who had made the fire?*

Was it a *man?*

He had read somewhere that the V-2 was the first spaceship. This—a huge rocket, manned, if the evidence of its ports were to be believed, could be a spaceship.

And it might not be an earthly one . . .

He shivered, remembering the unpleasant extra-Terran monsters invented by H. G. Wells and all his imitators. This, he told himself, would explain everything. He scrabbled in the bed of the stream until he found a stone, elongated and with a natural grip, that would make a club of sorts. And he walked slowly and warily towards the ladder.

It was there, at the foot of the ladder, that he found the first skeleton. He did not see it—so intent was he on the port in the ship's side—until the ribs cracked under his feet. He jumped back hastily, fearing some kind of trap. It was a long while before his heart stopped pumping noisily, before he was able to bring himself to examine the cause of his alarm.

It was a human skeleton. There was nothing alien, nothing otherworldly about it. The skull, brown and discolored, grinned up at him with that singular lack of dignity found only in dry bones. Death is only horrible and frightening when recent.

The castaway stood for a while studying his find. He picked up the skull. He examined it with some hazy idea of determining the cause of death. He wondered to what race its owner had belonged. "It's a white man's skull," he said with conviction, although he did not know why he should be so sure. He put it down with

the rest of the bones and thought—"I'll have to give the poor blighter a decent burial. . . ."

Still gripping his stone club he climbed carefully up the ladder. It was a retractable one, he saw, that when not in use telescoped into a recess in the hull. He stepped cautiously through the big, circular port. It gave access to a small compartment. On the bulkhead opposite to the shell plating was another door. That too was open.

The ship was dead. Nothing had worked in her, nobody had been living in her for a long time. Some seamanlike sense told the man this as he clambered up interminable ladders, through the central well of the ship, to the "greenhouse" in the nose that must surely be the control room. There was light of a sort, for all hatches were open and the sun was striking through the glass of the "greenhouse." There was enough light for the man to feel that his stone club was an absurd encumbrance, so he dropped it. It fell with a dull, flat thud to the plastic-covered deck.

The control room, in spite of the encrustation of windblown dirt on the transparency of its walls, seemed brilliantly lit. The castaway pulled himself up through the last hatch and gazed spellbound upon the glittering complexity of apparatus, the profusion of instruments whose use he could never hope to fathom. He ignored for a while the three skeletons that sat, or had sat, before the decay of ligaments brought collapse before control panels.

AT LAST he brought himself to examine them. They were all human. There was a little granular litter around their bones, the long dry droppings of rats. There were shreds of fabric that might once have been clothing. And there was a watch, a wristlet watch with a metallic strap. The castaway picked it up. It started to tick almost at once—the faint noise abnormally loud. He looked at it curiously. The dial had Arabic numerals, one to twenty-four. There was a sweep second hand. He could see no means of winding or setting it.

He put it down beside its owner. The idea of plundering the dead never occurred to him. And then he prowled around the control room staring at the instruments, wishing that he knew who had built this ship, and when. The technology involved must have been far in advance of anything that he had known or heard of. Yet she had obviously been here for years, at least. He sighed.

He clambered down the ladders into the body of the ship, searching for the storeroom. He found it at last. He could barely see, in the dim light, the little plaque over the door. It said, in bold English characters, FOOD STORES. He had trouble with the door itself. He finally discovered that it did not open in or out, but slid to one side.

There were food containers in there, not of tinned metal but of plastic. The first one that he opened—he pulled a tab and the entire top of the container fell away—contained tomato juice. The second one was asparagus. He restrained himself from running riot among the supplies, opening container after container to sample the contents, and took the two that he had already opened outside where there was more light. There was no maker's label. All that there was was a conventionalized picture of the contents in low bas relief and, in raised characters, the words TOMATO JUICE and ASPARAGUS.

Replete, but sorely puzzled, he clambered back to the control room. He was determined to find some evidence as to the builders of this ship. Ignoring the skeletons, he searched among the rubbish on the deck. He found what seemed to be the remains of a book. He cursed the rats that had left him no more than the stiff covers, a few torn strips of some smooth plastic between them. But he blew the dust from the cover. He read what was written on it in a bold, firm hand. And he refused to believe what he had read.

*Log of the Interstellar Ship CENTAURUS,* somebody had penned, somewhen. *Voyage* 1 . . .

Interstellar ship? he thought.

*Interstellar* ship?

The word *Interplanetary* would have brought grudging credence. The word *Interstellar* wasn't yet in Man's practical dictionary.

And yet . . .

He looked at the glittering complexity of instruments, the strange devices.

And half believed.

"I must have a look at their engine room," he said aloud.

THE engine room was aft. There was almost no machinery as he understood it. There were things that looked like the breeches of enormous guns, from which ran wiring and very fine tubes or pipes. The guns pointed down. It was obvious rocket drive. Atomic? He could not say.

Still not content, he started to climb again the ladders up through the central well. And he saw a door that he had passed on his way down. This time something made him stop to examine it more closely. Faintly shining in the dim light were the words—MANNSCHEN DRIVE UNIT.

*Mannschen Drive?*

He shook his head in puzzlement. The name meant nothing to him. But it must have meant something to the English speaking humans who had manned this ship. He started to try to open the door. It was jammed. He decided that the investigation would have to wait until later, until he found some means of forcing an entry. And then the door yielded.

It was dark in the compartment behind the door. He saw vague, hulking masses of machinery, mechanism that seemed to make more sense than what he had seen in the after engine room. There were wheels and levers, and their curves and straight, rigid lines were reassuring.

He wished that he could have more light. His hand went up inside the door, found a stud. Unconsciously he pressed it. He cried out when the lights came on. And after he had come to take the miracle of light itself for granted he still marveled at the efficiency of the storage batteries that had made the miracle possible.

There were bodies in the Mannschen Drive room, sprawled before the machine they had served. They weren't skeletons. The tight shut door had kept out the intruders that had stripped their shipmates elsewhere in the ship. They could have been mummies. The skin, almost black, was stretched taut over the bones of their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faces. Their teeth startlingly white, showed in unpleasant grins. They were still wearing what appeared to be a uniform of sorts. It was simple, mere shorts and shirts that had once been blue, epaulettes upon which shone gold insignia.

The castaway bent to examine the two bodies, his nostrils wrinkling with the odor of slow decay that still hung around them. Then he saw that there was a third body behind the machine. He went to examine it, then recoiled hastily. The unlucky man, whoever he had been, had been literally turned inside out.

He had to go outside until he had fought down his rising nausea. When he returned he studiously ignored the bodies, tried to turn all his attention to the enigmatic machine. It was not long before he succeeded. The intricacy of wheels was the most fascinating thing that he had ever seen. None of its parts was especially small, yet all had the workmanship associated only with the finest products of the watchmaker's art.

THERE was a metal plate on one of the four pillars that formed a framework for the machine. It was covered with lettering. It was headed—INSTRUCTIONS FOR OPERATING THE MANNSCHEN INTERSTELLAR DRIVE UNIT. Most of what followed was, to the castaway, gibberish. There was continual reference to something called temporal precession. Whatever it was, it was important.

He found himself remembering the course that he had taken, not so long ago, in the operation of gyro compasses. He remembered how a gyroscope will precess at right angles to an applied force. But . . . *temporal precession?*

Yet Time, the wise men tell us, is a dimension. . . .

And wasn't there an absurd limerick about it all?

"There was a young fellow called Bright,
Whose speed was much faster than light;
He started one day in a relative way—
And arrived the previous night."

Temporal precession. . . . An interstellar drive. . . .

It was utterly crazy, but it made a mad kind of sense.

The castaway turned from the incomprehensible machine to its control panel. Many of the switches and buttons upon it were marked with symbols utterly outside the scope of his knowledge. But there were two studs whose functions he could understand. One bore the legend START, and the other one, STOP.

He stood before the panel. His right hand raised itself. He told himself that, even though there had been sufficient power in the storage batteries to operate the lighting, there would never be enough to move one minor part of the complex machine. And the memories of occasions in the past when he had been told not to meddle, not to play with things about which he understood nothing, were deliberately pushed into the background of his mind.

It would be so easy to press the button

marked START. It would be just as easy to press that marked STOP if the machine showed signs of getting out of hand.

From the deck the dead men grinned at him.

But he was not looking at them.

His right index finger came up slowly. It stabbed at the starting button. The first joint whitened as he applied pressure. At first nothing happened. Then there was a sharp click. Immediately the lights dimmed, the many wheels of the machine, great and small, started to spin. The castaway turned to look at them, found his gaze caught and held by the largest of the wheels.

It turned slowly at first. It gathered speed. And spinning, it blurred most strangely. It was a solid wheel. But its outlines faded. The glittering intricacy of those parts of the machine behind it showed with ever-increasing clarity. It was impossible to tear the eyes away from the uncanny spectacle. It seemed that it was dragging the man's vision, the man himself, after it, into some unguessable, unplumbable gulf.

He screamed then. But he could not look away, could not break the spell of this devil's machinery. Vivid before his mind's eyes was a picture of the man at whom he had not dared to look too closely—the third body. In desperation his hand groped out behind him, fumbled, found the switchboard. He felt a stud beneath his questing fingers. He pressed. There was the same stickiness as before, the same sharp click.

The machinery slowed, spinning reluctantly to a stop. The vanishing, precessing wheel faded slowly back into view. But the castaway did not see this. Possessed by a terror such as he had never known he had half fallen, half scrambled down the interminable ladders to the airlock; had half fallen, half jumped from there to the ground.

THE afternoon sun was blazing hot as he splashed and floundered down the watercourse to the beach. The sight of the sea, an element of which he had, at least, a partial understanding, did much to calm him. And the sight of a faint smudge of smoke on the horizon, and all that that im-

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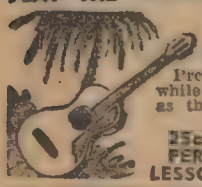

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plied, almost drove the memory of his weird experience from his mind.

He ran up the beach to where the ashes of the fire had been. But the sand, as far as he could see, was clean. But what did it matter that some freak sea had swept away a handful or so of useless rubbish? Working with calm haste he burrowed into the jungle verge, emerged with armfuls of dry and partially dry sticks and leaves. As he piled up his beacon he glanced at frequent intervals to seaward. He could see the ship herself now, could see that her course would take her not more than three miles from the island.

He finished off his pile of inflammables with green branches and leaves. He knelt in the lee of it, with trembling hands fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco pouch and lighter. He got the lighter out, snapped back the cover. His thumb flicked the wheel, the wick caught at once, its faint pale flame almost invisible in the bright sunlight.

And the lowermost layers of vegetable refuse smoked and smouldered ever so little—but refused to burn.

The castaway extinguished the lighter flame. He tore off his shirt. The garment was old and threadbare, ripped as he pulled it savagely over his head. But it was ideally suited to his present purpose. He clawed out a hollow in the sand at the base of the reluctant bonfire and stuffed the cloth into it, careful to see that it was not packed too tightly.

This time the lighter was slow to function. His thumb was almost raw before he succeeded in producing a feeble, flickering flame. But the shirt caught at the first touch of fire. In what seemed to be an incredibly short time the flames were licking up through the dry wood to the green stuff on top, the pillar of brown smoke was climbing up into the blue sky.

At first the castaway danced and waved beside his signal. Then, as the ship drew nearer, he fell silent and motionless. He stared hard at the approaching rescuers. The first beginnings of panic were making his heart pump violently.

It was the funnel that frightened him. He could see it plainly now—scarlet and black slapped on over drab, wartime gray.

And in the second that remained before he was to find himself struggling in the water he cried:

"Have I got to go through all this again?"

**Still Cookin'**

"TOO many cooks spoil the broth." That's what's they say, but we at WEIRD TALES are not worried. This witches' brew in the big caldron labeled "March, 1948 issue" has had a lot of stirrings—readers and friends, editors and so on—and its growing more powerful every day.

We've mixed in a little advice from here, an opinion or three from there and the whole thing (this twenty-fifth anniversary number of WEIRD TALES) seems to be going very, very nicely.

Yes, we never knew we had so many interested friends. Right here and now we want to thank all the grand people who've taken the trouble to write in those many letters saying: "You *must* have a Quinn story in the anniversary issue," or "Be sure there's a Derleth and a Manly Wellman piece," and "Don't forget to include Allison Harding and Ed Hamilton . . . and how about Clark Ashton Smith?"

Well, you'll find these people, and all your other favorites, in the March, 1948 WEIRD. We've crammed in as many WT headliners as possible and we're happy to acknowledge here and now that you readers have played no small part in helping us decide on the "musts" and "shoulds" of the anniversary issue lineup.

So its a case of the old axiom being wrong. The more cooks the merrier, we say!

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# Come and Go Mad

## I

HE HAD known it, somehow, when he had awakened that morning. He knew it more surely now, staring out of the editorial room window into the early afternoon sunlight slanting down among the buildings to cast a pattern of light and shadow. He knew that soon, perhaps even today, something important was going to happen. Whether good or bad he did not know, but he darkly suspected. And with reason; there are few good things that may unexpectedly happen to a man, things, that is, of lasting importance. Disaster can strike from innumerable directions, in amazingly diverse ways.

A voice said, "Hey, Mr. Vine," and he turned away from the window, slowly. That in itself was strange for it was not his manner to move slowly; he was a small, volatile man, almost cat-like in the quickness of his reactions and his movements.

But this time something made him turn slowly from the window, almost as though he never again expected to see that chiaroscuro of an early afternoon.

He said, "Hi, Red."

The freckled copy boy said, "His Nibs wants to see ya."

"Now?"

"Naw. Atcher convenience. Sometime next week, maybe. If yer busy, give him an apperntment."

He put his fist against Red's chin and shoved, and the copy boy staggered back in assumed distress.

He got up out of his chair and went over to the water cooler. He pressed his thumb on the button and water gurgled into the paper cup.

Harry Wheeler sauntered over and said, "Hiya, Nappy. What's up? Going on the carpet?"

He said, "Sure, for a raise."

He drank and crumpled the cup, tossing it into the waste basket. He went over to the door marked Private and went through it.

Walter J. Candler, the managing editor, looked up from the work on his desk and said affably, "Sit down, Vine. Be with you in a moment," and then looked down again.

He slid into the chair opposite Candler, worried a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lighted it. He studied the back of the sheet of paper of which the managing editor was reading the front. There wasn't anything on the back of it.

The M. E. put the paper down and looked at him. "Vine, I've got a screwy one. You're good on screwy ones."

He grinned slowly at the M. E. He said, "If that's a compliment, thanks."

"It's a compliment, all right. You've done some pretty tough things for us. This one's different. I've never yet asked a reporter to do anything I wouldn't do myself. *I* wouldn't do this, so I'm not asking you to."

The M. E. picked up the paper he'd been reading and then put it down again without even looking at it. "Ever hear of Ellsworth Joyce Randolph?"

"Head of the asylum? Hell yes, I've met him. Casually."

"How'd he impress you?"

HE WAS aware that the managing editor was staring at him intently, that it wasn't too casual a question. He parried. "What do you mean? In what way? You mean is he a good Joe, is he a good poli-

**Heading by Boris Dolgov**

*The recurring memory of things which could not have happened. . . .*

By Fredric Brown

tician, has he got a good bedside manner for a psychiatrist, or what?"

"I mean, how sane do you think he is?"

He looked at Candler and Candler wasn't kidding. Candler was strictly deadpan.

He began to laugh, and then he stopped laughing. He leaned forward across Candler's desk. "Ellsworth Joyce Randolph," he said. "You're talking about Ellsworth Joyce Randolph?"

Candler nodded. "Dr. Randolph was in here this morning. He told a rather strange story. He didn't want me to print it. He did want me to check on it, to send our best man to check on it. He said if we found it was true we could print it in hundred and twenty line type in red ink." Candler grinned wryly. "We could, at that."

HE STUMPED out his cigarette and studied Candler's face. "But the story itself is so screwy you're not sure whether Dr. Randolph himself might be insane?"

"Exactly."

"And what's tough about the assignment?"

"The doc says a reporter could get the story only from the inside."

"You mean, go in as a guard or something?"

Candler said, "Something."

"Oh."

He got up out of the chair and walked over to the window, stood with his back to the managing editor, looking out. The sun had moved hardly at all. Yet the shadow pattern in the streets looked different, obscurely different. The shadow pattern inside himself was different, too. This, he knew, was what had been going to happen. He turned around. He said, "No. Hell no."

Candler shrugged imperceptibly. "Don't blame you. I haven't even asked you to. I wouldn't do it myself."

He asked, "What does Ellsworth Joyce Randolph think is going on inside his nuthouse? It must be something pretty screwy if it made you wonder whether Randolph himself is sane."

"I can't tell you that, Vine. Promised him I wouldn't, whether or not you took the assignment."

"You mean—even if I took the job I still wouldn't know what I was looking for?"

"That's right. You'd be prejudiced. You wouldn't be objective. You'd be looking for something, and you might think you found it whether it was there or not. Or you might be so prejudiced against finding it that you'd refuse to recognize it if it bit you in the leg."

He strode from the window over to the desk and banged his fist down on it.

He said, "God damn it, Candler, why *me?* You know what happened to me three years ago."

"Sure. Amnesia."

"Sure, amnesia. Just like that. But I haven't kept it any secret that I never got *over* that amnesia. I'm thirty years old—or am I? My memory goes back three years. Do you know what it feels like to have a blank wall in your memory only three years back?

"Oh, sure, I know what's on the other side of that wall. I know because everybody tells me. I know I started here as a copy boy ten years ago. I know where I was born and when and I know my parents are both dead. I know what they look like—because I've seen their pictures. I know I didn't have a wife and kids, because everybody who knew me told me I didn't. Get that part—everybody who knew me, not everybody I knew. I didn't know anybody.

"Sure, I've done all right since then. After I got out of the hospital—and I don't even remember the accident that put me there—I did all right back here because I still knew how to write news stories, even though I had to learn everybody's name all over again. I wasn't any worse off than a new reporter starting cold on a paper in a strange city. And everybody was as helpful as hell."

Candler raised a placating hand to stem the tide. He said, "Okay, Nappy. You said no, and that's enough. I don't see what all that's got to do with this story, but all you had to do was say no. So forget about it."

The tenseness hadn't gone out of him. He said, "You don't see what *that's* got to do with the story? You ask—or, all right, you don't ask, you suggest—that I get myself certified as a madman, go into an asylum

as a patient. When—how much confidence does anyone have in his own mind when he can't remember going to school, can't remember the first time he met any of the people he works with every day, can't remember starting on the job he works at, can't remember—anything back of three years before?"

Abruptly he struck the desk again with his fist, and then looked foolish about it. He said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to get wound up about it like that."

Candler said, "Sit down."

"The answer's still no."

"Sit down, anyway."

He sat down and fumbled a cigarette out of his pocket, got it lighted.

Candler said, "I didn't even mean to mention it, but I've got to now. Now that you talked that way. I didn't know you felt like that about your amnesia. I thought that was water under the bridge.

"Listen, when Dr. Randolph asked me what reporter we had that could best cover it, I told him about you. What your background was. He remembered meeting you, too, incidentally. But he hadn't known you'd had amnesia."

"Is that why you suggested me?"

"Skip that till I make my point. He said that while you were there, he'd be glad to try one of the newer, milder forms of shock treatment on you, and that it might restore your lost memories. He said it would be worth trying."

"He didn't say it would work."

"He said it might; that it wouldn't do any harm."

HE STUBBED out the cigarette from which he'd taken only three drags. He glared at Candler. He didn't have to say what was in his mind; the managing editor could read it.

Candler said, "Calm down, boy. Remember I didn't bring it up until you yourself started in on how much that memory-wall bothered you. I wasn't saving it for ammunition. I mentioned it only out of fairness to you, after the way you talked."

"Fairness!"

Candler shrugged. "You said no. I accepted it. Then you started raving at me and put me in a spot where I had to mention something I'd hardly thought of at the time. Forget it. How's that graft story coming? Any new leads?"

"You going to put someone else on the asylum story?"

"No. You're the logical one for it."

"What *is* the story? It must be pretty woolly if it makes you wonder if Dr. Randolph is sane. Does he think his patients ought to trade places with his doctors, or what?"

He laughed. "Sure, you can't tell me. That's really beautiful double bait. Curiosity—and hope of knocking down that wall. So what's the rest of it? If I say yes instead of no, how long will I be there, under what circumstances? What chance have I got of getting out again? How do I get in?"

Candler said slowly, "Vine, I'm not sure any more I want you to try it. Let's skip the whole thing."

"Let's not. Not until you answer my questions, anyway."

"All right. You'd go in anonymously, so there wouldn't be any stigma attached if the story wouldn't work out. If it does, you can tell the whole truth—including Dr. Randolph's collusion in getting you in and out again. The cat will be out of the bag, then.

"You might get what you want in a few days—and you wouldn't stay on it more than a couple of weeks in any case."

"How many at the asylum would know who I was and what I was there for, besides Randolph?"

"No one." Candler leaned forward and held up four fingers of his left hand. He pointed to the first. "Four people would have to be in on it. You." He pointed to one finger. "Me." A second. "Dr. Randolph." The third finger. "And one other reporter from here."

"Not that I'd object, but why the other reporter?"

"Intermediary. In two ways. First, he'll go with you to some psychiatrist; Randolph will recommend one you can fool comparatively easily. He'll be your brother and request that you be examined and certified. You convince the psychiatrist you're nuts and he'll certify you. Of course it takes two

doctors to put you away, but Randolph will be the second. Your alleged brother will want Randolph for the second one."

"All this under an assumed name?"

"If you prefer. Of course there's no real reason why it should be."

"That's the way I feel about it. Keep it out of the papers, of course. Tell everybody around here—except my—hey, in that case we couldn't make up a brother. But Charlie Doerr, in Circulation, is my first cousin and my nearest living relative. He'd do, wouldn't he?"

"Sure. And he'd have to be intermediary the rest of the way, then. Visit you at the asylum and bring back anything you have to send back."

"And if, in a couple of weeks, I've found nothing, you'll spring me?"

Candler nodded. "I'll pass the word to Randolph; he'll interview you and pronounce you cured, and you're out. You come back here, and you've been on vacation. That's all."

"What kind of insanity should I pretend to have?"

He thought Candler squirmed a little in his chair. Candler said, "Well—wouldn't this Nappy business be a natural? I mean, paranoia is a form of insanity which, Dr. Randolph told me, hasn't any physical symptoms. It's just a delusion supported by a systematic framework of rationalization. A paranoiac can be sane in every way except one."

He watched Candler and there was a faint twisted grin on his lips. "You mean I should think I'm Napoleon?"

Candler gestured slightly. "Choose your own delusion. But—isn't that one a natural? I mean, the boys around the office always kidding you and calling you Nappy. And—" He finished weakly, "—and everything."

And then Candler looked at him squarely. "Want to do it?"

He stood up. "I think so. I'll let you know for sure tomorrow morning after I've slept on it, but unofficially—yes. Is that good enough?"

Candler nodded.

He said, "I'm taking the rest of the afternoon off; I'm going to the library to read up on paranoia. Haven't anything else to do anyway. And I'll talk to Charlie Doerr this evening. Okay?"

"Fine. Thanks."

He grinned at Candler. He leaned across the desk. He said, "I'll let you in on a little secret, now that things have gone this far. Don't tell anyone. I *am* Napoleon!"

It was a good exit line, so he went out.

## II

HE GOT his hat and coat and went outside, out of the air-conditioning and into the hot sunlight. Out of the quiet madhouse of a newspaper office after deadline, into the quieter madhouse of the streets on a sultry July afternoon.

He tilted his panama back on his head and ran his handkerchief across his forehead. Where was he going? Not to the library to bone up on paranoia; that had been a gag to get off for the rest of the afternoon. He'd read everything the library had on paranoia—and on allied subjects—over two years ago. He was an expert on it. He could fool any psychiatrist in the country into thinking that he was sane—or that he wasn't.

He walked north to the park and sat down on one of the benches in the shade. He put his hat on the bench beside him and mopped his forehead again.

He stared out at the grass, bright green in the sunlight, at the pigeons with their silly head-bobbing method of walking, at a red squirrel that came down one side of a tree, looked about him and scurried up the other side of the same tree.

And he thought back to the wall of amnesia of three years ago.

The wall that hadn't been a wall at all. The phrase intrigued him: a wall at all. Pigeons on the grass, alas. A wall at all.

It wasn't a wall at all; it was a shift, an abrupt change. A line had been drawn between two lives. Twenty-seven years of a life before the accident. Three years of a life since the accident.

They were not the same life.

But no one knew. Until this afternoon he had never even hinted the truth—if it *was* the truth—to anyone. He'd used it as an exit line in leaving Candler's office,

knowing Candler would take it as a gag. Even so, one had to be careful; use a gag-line like that often, and people begin to wonder.

The fact that his extensive injuries from that accident had included a broken jaw was probably responsible for the fact that today he was free and not in an insane asylum. That broken jaw—it had been in a cast when he'd returned to consciousness forty-eight hours after his car had run head-on into a truck ten miles out of town—had prevented him from talking for three weeks.

And by the end of three weeks, despite the pain and the confusion that had filled them, he'd had a chance to think things over. He'd invented the wall. The amnesia, the convenient amnesia that was so much more believable than the truth as he knew it.

But *was* the truth as he knew it?

That was the haunting ghost that had ridden him for three years now, since the very hour when he had awakened to whiteness in a white room and a stranger, strangely dressed, had been sitting beside a bed the like of which had been in no field hospital he'd ever heard of or seen. A bed with an overhead framework. And when he looked from the stranger's face down at his own body, he saw that one of his legs and both of his arms were in casts and that the cast of the leg stuck upward at an angle, a rope running over a pulley holding it so.

He'd tried to open his mouth to ask where he was, what had happened to him, and that was when he had discovered the cast on his jaw.

He'd stared at the stranger, hoping the latter would have sense enough to volunteer the information and the stranger had grinned at him and said, "Hi, George. Back with us, huh? You'll be all right."

And there was something strange about the language—until he placed what it was. English. Was he in the hands of the English? And it was a language, too, which he knew little of, yet he understood the stranger perfectly. And why did the stranger call him George?

Maybe some of the doubt, some of the the fierce bewilderment, showed in his eyes, for the stranger leaned closer to the bed. He said, "Maybe you're still confused, George. You were in a pretty bad smashup. You ran that coupe of yours head-on into a gravel truck. That was two days ago, and you're just coming out of it for the first time. You're all right, but you'll be in the hospital for a while, till all the bones you busted knit. Nothing seriously wrong with you."

And then waves of pain had come and swept away the confusion, and he had closed his eyes.

Another voice in the room said, "We're going to give you a hypo, Mr. Vine," but he hadn't dared open his eyes again. It was easier to fight the pain without seeing.

There had been the prick of a needle in his upper arm. And pretty soon there'd been nothingness.

WHEN he came back again—twelve hours later, he learned afterwards—it had been to the same white room, the same strange bed, but this time there was a woman in the room, a woman in a strange white costume standing at the foot of the bed studying a paper that was fastened to a piece of board.

She had smiled at him when she saw that his eyes were open. She said, "Good morning, Mr. Vine. Hope you're feeling better. I'll tell Dr. Holt that you're back with us."

She went away and came back with a man who was also strangely dressed, in roughly the same fashion as had been the stranger who had called him George.

The doctor looked at him and chuckled. "Got a patient, for once, who can't talk back to me. Or even write notes." Then his face sobered. "Are you in pain, though? Blink once if you're not, twice if you are."

The pain wasn't really very bad this time, and he blinked once. The doctor nodded with satisfaction. "That cousin of yours," he said, "has kept calling up. He'll be glad to know you're going to be back in shape to—well, to listen if not to talk. Guess it won't hurt you to see him a while this evening."

The nurse rearranged his bedclothing and then, mercifully, both she and the doctor had gone, leaving him alone to straighten out his chaotic thoughts.

Straighten them out? That had been three

years ago, and he hadn't been able to straighten them out yet:

The startling fact that they'd spoken English and that he'd understood that barbaric tongue perfectly, despite his slight previous knowledge of it. How could an accident have made him suddenly fluent in a language which he had known but slightly?

The startling fact that they'd called him by a different name. "George" had been the name used by the man who'd been beside his bed last night. "Mr. Vine," the nurse had called him. George Vine, an English name, surely.

But there was one thing a thousand times more startling than either of those: It was what last night's stranger (Could he be the "cousin" of whom the doctor had spoken?) had told him about the accident. "You ran that coupe of yours head-on into a gravel truck."

The amazing thing, the contradictory thing, was that he *knew* what a coupe was and what a truck was. Not that he had any recollection of having driven either, of the accident itself, or of anything beyond that moment when he'd been sitting in the tent after Lodi—but—but how could a picture of a coupe, something driven by a gasoline engine, arise to his mind when such a concept had never been *in* his mind before.

There was that mad mingling of two worlds—the one sharp and clear and definite. The world he'd lived his twenty-seven years of life in, in the world into which he'd been born twenty-seven years ago, on August 15th, 1769, in Corsica. The world in which he'd gone to sleep—it seemed like last night—in his tent at Lodi, as General of the Army in Italy, after his first important victory in the field.

And then there was this disturbing world into which he had awakened, this white world in which people spoke an English—now that he thought of it—which was different from the English he had heard spoken at Brienne, in Valence, at Toulon, and yet which he understood perfectly, which he knew instinctively that he could speak if his jaw were not in a cast. This world in which people called him George Vine, and in which, strangest of all, people used words that he did not know, could not conceivably know, and yet which brought pictures to his mind.

Coupe, truck. They were both forms of—the word came to his mind unbidden—automobiles. He concentrated on what an automobile was and how it worked, and the information was there. The cylinder block, the pistons driven by explosions of gasoline vapor, ignited by a spark of electricity from a generator—

Electricity. He opened his eyes and looked upward at the shaded light in the ceiling, and he knew, somehow, that it was an *electric* light, and in a general way he knew what electricity was.

The Italian Galvani—yes, he'd read of some experiments of Galvani, but they hadn't encompassed anything practical such as a light like that. And staring at the shaded light, he visualized behind it water power running dynamos, miles of wire, motors running generators. He caught his breath at the concept that came to him out of his own mind, or part of his own mind.

The faint, fumbling experiments of Galvani with their weak currents and kicking frogs' legs had scarcely foreshadowed the unmysterious mystery of that light up in the ceiling; and that was the strangest thing yet; part of his mind found it mysterious and another part took it for granted and understood in a general sort of way how it all worked.

Let's see, he thought, the electric light was invented by Thomas Alva Edison somewhere around—Ridiculous; he'd been going to say around 1900, and it was now only 1796!

And then the really horrible thing came to him and he tried—painfully, in vain—to sit up in bed. It *had* been 1900, his memory told him, and Edison had died in 1931—And a man named Napoleon Bonaparte had died a hundred and ten years before that, in 1821.

He'd nearly gone insane then.

And, sane or insane, only the fact that he could not speak had kept him out of a madhouse; it gave him time to think things out, time to realize that his only chance lay in pretending amnesia, in pretending that he remembered nothing of life prior to the accident. They don't put you in a mad-

house for amnesia. They tell you who you are, let you go back to what they tell you your former life was. They let you pick up the threads and weave them, while you try to remember.

Three years ago he'd done that. Now, tomorrow, he was going to a psychiatrist and say that he was—Napoleon!

III

THE slant of the sun was greater. Overhead a big bird of a plane droned by and he looked up at it and began laughing, quietly to himself—not the laughter of madness. True laughter because it sprang from the conception of Napoleon Bonaparte riding in a plane like that and from the overwhelming incongruity of that idea.

It came to him then that he'd never ridden in a plane, that he remembered. Maybe George Vine had; at some time in the twenty-seven years of life George Vine had spent, he must have. But did that mean that *he* had ridden in one? That was a question that was part of the big question.

He got up and started to walk again. It was almost five o'clock; pretty soon Charlie Doerr would be leaving the paper and going home for dinner. Maybe he'd better phone Charlie and be sure he'd be home this evening.

He headed for the nearest bar and phoned; he got Charlie just in time. He said, "This is George. Going to be home this evening?"

"Sure, George. I was going to a poker game, but I called it off when I learned you'd be around."

"When you learned—Oh, Candler talked to you?"

"Yeah. Say, I didn't know you'd phone me or I'd have called Marge, but how about coming out for dinner? It'll be all right with her; I'll call her now if you can."

He said, "Thanks, no, Charlie. Got a dinner date. And say, about that card game; you can go. I can get there about seven and we won't have to talk all evening; an hour'll be enough. You wouldn't be leaving before eight anyway."

Charlie said, "Don't worry about it; I don't much want to go anyway, and you haven't been out for a while. So I'll see you at seven, then."

From the phone booth, he walked over to the bar and ordered a beer. He wondered why he'd turned down the invitation to dinner; probably because, subconsciously, he wanted another couple of hours by himself before he talked to anyone, even Charlie and Marge.

He sipped his beer slowly, because he wanted to make it last; he had to stay sober tonight, plenty sober. There was still time to change his mind; he'd left himself a loophole, however small. He could still go to Candler in the morning and say he'd decided not to do it.

Over the rim of his glass he stared at himself in the back-bar mirror. Small, sandy-haired, with freckles on his nose, stocky. The small and stocky part fitted all right; but the rest of it! Not the remotest resemblance.

He drank another beer slowly, and that made it half past five.

He wandered out again and walked, this time toward town. He walked past the *Blade* and looked up to the third floor and at the window he'd been looking out of when Candler had sent for him. He wondered if he'd ever sit by that window again and look out across a sunlit afternoon.

Maybe. Maybe not.

He thought about Clare. Did he want to see her tonight?

Well, no, to be honest about it, he didn't. But if he disappeared for two weeks or so without having even said good-bye to her, then he'd have to write her off his books; she wouldn't like that.

He'd better.

He stopped in at a drug store and called her home. He said, "This is George, Clare. Listen, I'm being sent out of town tomorrow on an assignment; don't know how long I'll be gone. One of those things that might be a few days or a few weeks. But could I see you late this evening, to say so-long?"

"Why sure, George. What time?"

"It might be after nine, but not much after. That be okay? I'm seeing Charlie first, on business; may not be able to get away before nine."

"Of course, George. Any time."

HE STOPPED in at a hamburger stand, although he wasn't hungry, and managed to eat a sandwich and a piece of pie. That made it a quarter after six and, if he walked, he'd get to Charlie's at just about the right time. So he walked.

Charlie met him at the door. With finger on his lips, he jerked his head backward toward the kitchen where Marge was wiping dishes. He whispered, "I didn't tell Marge, George. It'd worry her."

He wanted to ask Charlie why it would, or should, worry Marge, but he didn't. Maybe he was a little afraid of the answer. It would have to mean that Marge was worrying about him already, and that was a bad sign. He thought he'd been carrying everything off pretty well for three years now.

Anyway, he couldn't ask because Charlie was leading him into the living room and the kitchen was within easy earshot, and Charlie was saying, "Glad you decided you'd like a game of chess, George. Marge is going out tonight; movie she wants to see down at the neighborhood show. I was going to that card game out of self-defense, but I didn't want to."

He got the chessboard and men out of the closet and started to set up a game on the coffee table.

Marge came in with a try bearing tall cold glasses of beer and put it down beside the chessboard. She said, "Hi, George. Hear you're going away a couple of weeks."

He nodded. "But I don't know where. Candler—the managing editor—asked me if I'd be free for an out of town assignment and I said sure, and he said he'd tell me about it tomorrow."

Charlie was holding out clenched hands, a pawn in each, and he touched Charlie's left hand and got white. He moved pawn to king's fourth and, when Charlie did the same, advanced his queen's pawn.

Marge was fussing with her hat in front of the mirror. She said, "If you're not here when I get back, George, so long and good luck."

He said, "Thanks, Marge. 'Bye."

He made a few more moves before Marge came over, ready to go, kissed Charlie good-bye and then kissed him lightly on the forehead. She said, "Take care of yourself, George."

For a moment his eyes met her pale blue ones and he thought, she *is* worrying about me. It scared him a little.

After the door had closed behind her, he said, "Let's not finish the game, Charlie. Let's get to the brass tacks, because I've got to see Clare about nine. Dunno how long I'll be gone, so I can't very well not say good-bye to her."

Charlie looked up at him. "You and Clare serious, George?"

"I don't know."

Charlie picked up his beer and took a sip. Suddenly his voice was brisk and business-like. He said, "All right, let's sit on the brass tacks. We've got an appointment for eleven o'clock tomorrow morning with a guy named Irving, Dr. J. E. Irving, in the Appleton Block. He's a psychiatrist; Dr. Randolph recommended him.

"I called him up this afternoon after Candler had talked to me; Candler had already phoned Randolph. My story was this: I gave my right name. I've got a cousin who's been acting queer lately and whom I wanted him to talk to. I didn't give the cousin's name. I didn't tell him in what way you'd been acting queer; I ducked the question and said I'd rather have him judge for himself without prejudice. I said I'd talked you into talking to a psychiatrist and that the only one I knew of was Randolph; that I'd called Randolph who said he didn't do much private practice and recommended Irving. I told him I was your nearest living relative.

"That leaves the way open to Randolph for the second name on the certificate. If you can talk Irving into thinking you're really insane and he wants to sign you up, I can insist on having Randolph, whom I wanted in the first place. And this time, of course, Randolph will agree."

"You didn't say a thing about what kind of insanity you suspected me of having?"

Charlie shook his head. He said, "So, anyway, neither of us goes to work at the *Blade* tomorrow. I'll leave home the usual time so Marge won't know anything, but I'll

meet you downtown—say, in the lobby of the Christina—at a quarter of eleven. And if you can convince Irving that you're committable—if that's the word—we'll get Randolph right away and get the whole thing settled tomorrow."

"And if I change my mind?"

"Then I'll call the appointment off. That's all. Look, isn't that all there is to talk over? Let's play this game of chess out; it's only twenty after seven."

He shook his head. "I'd rather talk, Charlie. One thing you forgot to cover, anyway. After tomorrow. How often you coming to see me to pick up bulletins for Candler?"

"Oh, sure, I forgot that. As often as visiting hours will permit—three times a week. Monday, Wednesday, Friday afternoons. Tomorrow's Friday, so if you get in, the first time I'll be able to see you is Monday."

"Okay. Say, Charlie, did Candler even hint to you at what the story is that I'm supposed to get in there?"

Charlie Doerr shook his head slowly. "Not a word. What is it? Or is it too secret for you to talk about?"

He stared at Charlie, wondering. And suddenly he felt that he couldn't tell the truth; that he didn't know either. It would make him look too silly. It hadn't sounded so foolish when Candler had given the reason—*a* reason, anyway—for not telling him, but it would sound foolish now.

He said, "If he didn't tell you, I guess I'd better not either, Charlie." And since that didn't sound too convincing, he added, "I promised Candler I wouldn't."

Both glasses of beer were empty by then, and Charlie took them into the kitchen for refilling.

HE FOLLOWED Charlie, somehow preferring the informality of the kitchen. He sat a-straddle on a kitchen chair, leaning his elbows on the back of it, and Charlie leaned against the refrigerator.

Charlie said, "Prosit!" and they drank, and then Charlie asked, "Have you got your story ready for Doc Irving?"

He nodded. "Did Candler tell you what I'm to tell him?"

"You mean, that you're Napoleon?" Charlie chuckled. Did that chuckle quite ring true? He looked at Charlie, and he knew that what he was thinking was completely incredible. Charlie was square and honest as they came. Charlie and Marge were his best friends; they'd been his best friends for three years that he knew of. Longer than that, a hell of a lot longer, according to Charlie. But beyond those three years—that was something else again.

He cleared his throat because the words were going to stick a little. But he had to ask, he had to be sure. "Charlie, I'm going to ask you a hell of a question. Is this business on the up and up?"

"Huh?"

"It's a hell of a thing to ask. But—look, you and Candler don't think I'm crazy, do you? You didn't work this out between you to get me put away—or anyway examined—painlessly, without my knowing it was happening, till too late, did you?"

Charlie was staring at him. He said, "Jeez, George, you don't think I'd do a thing like that, do you?"

"No, I don't. But—you could think it was for my own good, and you might on that basis. Look, Charlie, if it *is* that, if you *think* that, let me point out that this isn't fair. I'm going up against a psychiatrist tomorrow to lie to him, to try to convince him that I have delusions. Not to be honest with him. And that would be unfair as hell, to me. You see that, don't you, Charlie?"

Charlie's face got a little white. He said slowly, "Before God, George, it's nothing like that. All I know about this is what Candler and you have told me.

"You think I'm sane, fully sane?"

Charlie licked his lips. He said, "You want it straight?"

"Yes."

"I never doubted it, until this moment. Unless—well, amnesia is a form of mental aberration, I suppose, and you've never got over that, but that isn't what you mean, is it?"

"No."

"Then, until right now—George, that sounds like a persecution complex, if you really meant what you asked me. A conspiracy to get you to— Surely you can see

how ridiculous it is. What possible reason would either Candler or I have to get you to lie yourself into being committed?"

He said, "I'm sorry, Charlie. It was just a screwy momentary notion. No, I don't think that, of course." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Let's finish that chess game, huh?"

"Fine. Wait till I give us a refill to take along."

HE PLAYED carelessly and managed to lose within fifteen minutes. He turned down Charlie's offer of a chance for revenge and leaned back in his chair.

He said, "Charlie, ever hear of chessmen coming in red and black?"

"N-no. Either black and white, or red and white, any I've ever seen. Why?"

"Well—" He grinned. "I suppose I oughtn't to tell you this after just making you wonder whether I'm really sane after all, but I've been having recurrent dreams recently. No crazier than ordinary dreams except that I've been dreaming the same things over and over. One of them is something about a game between the red and the black; I don't even know whether it's chess. You know how it is when you dream; things seem to make sense whether they do or not. In the dream, I don't wonder whether the red-and-black business is chess or not; I know, I guess, or seem to know. But the knowledge doesn't carry over. You know what I mean?"

"Sure. Go on."

"Well, Charlie, I've been wondering if it just might have something to do with the other side of that wall of amnesia I've never been able to cross. This is the first time in my—well, not in my life, maybe, but in the three years I remember of it, that I've had recurrent dreams. I wonder if—if my memory may not be trying to get through.

"Did I ever have a set of red and black chessman, for instance? Or, in any school I went to, did they have intramural basketball or baseball between red teams and black teams, or—or anything like that?"

Charlie thought for a long moment before he shook his head. "No," he said, "nothing like that. Of course there's red and black in roulette—rouge et noir. And it's the two colors in a deck of playing cards."

"No, I'm pretty sure it doesn't tie in with cards or roulette. It's not—not like that. It's a game *between* the red and the black. They're the players, somehow. Think hard, Charlie; not about where you might have run into that idea, but where *I* might have."

He watched Charlie struggle and after a while he said, "Okay, don't sprain your brain, Charlie. Try this one. *The brightly shining.*"

"The brightly shining what?"

"Just that phrase, *the brightly shining.* Does it mean anything to you, at all?"

"No."

"Okay," he said. "Forget it."

## IV

HE WAS early and he walked past Clare's house, as far as the corner and stood under the big elm there, smoking the rest of his cigarette, thinking bleakly.

There wasn't anything to thing about, really; all he had to do was say good-bye to her. Two easy syllables. And stall off her questions as to where he was going, exactly how long he'd be gone. Be quiet and casual and unemotional about it, just as though they didn't mean anything in particular to each other.

It *had* to be that way. He'd known Clare Wilson a year and a half now, and he'd kept her dangling that long; it wasn't fair. This had to be the end, for her sake. He had about as much business asking a woman to marry him as—as a madman who thinks he's Napoleon!

He dropped his cigarette and ground it viciously into the walk with his heel, then went back to the house, up on the porch, and rang the bell.

Clare herself came to the door. The light from the hallway behind her made her hair a circlet of spun gold around her shadowed face.

He wanted to take her into his arms so badly that he clenched his fists with the effort it took to keep his arms down.

Stupidly, he said, "Hi, Clare. How's everything?"

"I don't know, George. How *is* everything? Aren't you coming in?"

She'd stepped back from the doorway to let him past and the light was on her face now, sweetly grave. She knew something was up, he thought; her expression and the tone of her voice gave that away.

He didn't want to go in. He said, "It's such a beautiful night, Clare. Let's take a stroll."

"All right, George." She came out onto the porch. "It is a fine night, such beautiful stars." She turned and looked at him. "Is one of them yours?"

He started a little. Then he stepped forward and took her elbow, guiding her down the porch steps. He said lightly, "All of them are mine. Want to buy any?"

"You wouldn't *give* me one? Just a teeny little dwarf star, maybe? Even one that I'd have to use a telescope to see?"

THEY were out on the sidewalk then, out of hearing of the house, and abruptly her voice changed, the playful note dropped from it, and she asked another question, "What's wrong, George?"

He opened his mouth to say nothing was wrong, and then closed it again. There wasn't any lie that he could tell her, and he couldn't tell her the truth, either. Her asking of that question, in that way, should have made things easier; it made them more difficult.

She asked another, "You mean to say good-bye for—for good, don't you, George?"

He said, "Yes," and his mouth was very dry. He didn't know whether it came out as an articulate monosyllable or not, and he wetted his lips and tried again. He said, "Yes, I'm afraid so, Clare."

"Why?"

He couldn't make himself turn to look at her, he stared blindly ahead. He said, "I—I can't tell you, Clare. But it's the only thing I can do. It's best for both of us."

"Tell me one thing, George. Are you really going away? Or was that just—an excuse?"

"It's true. I'm going away; I don't know for how long. But don't ask me where, please. I can't tell you that."

"Maybe I can tell you, George. Do you mind if I do?"

He minded all right; he minded terribly. But how could he say so? He didn't say anything, because he couldn't say yes, either.

They were beside the park now, the little neighborhood park that was only a block square and didn't offer much in the way of privacy, but which did have benches. And he steered her—or she steered him; he didn't know which—into the park and they sat down on a bench. There were other people in the park, but not too near. Still he hadn't answered her question.

She sat very close to him on the bench. She said, "You've been worried about your mind, haven't you George?"

"Well—yes, in a way, yes, I have."

"And you're going away has something to do with that, hasn't it? You're going somewhere for observation or treatment, or both?"

"Something like that. It's not as simple as that, Clare, and I—I just can't tell you about it."

She put her hand on his hand, lying on his knee. She said, "I knew it was something like that, George. And I don't ask you to tell me anything about it.

"Just—just don't say what you meant to say. Say so-long instead of good-bye. Don't even write me, if you don't want to. But don't be noble and call everything off here and now, for my sake. At least wait until you've been wherever you're going. Will you?"

HE gulped. She made it sound so simple when actually it was so complicated. Miserably he said, "All right, Clare. If you want it that way."

Abruptly she stood up. "Let's get back, George."

He stood beside her. "But it's early."

"I know, but sometimes— Well, there's a psychological moment to end a date, George. I know that sounds silly, but after what we've said, wouldn't it be—uh—anticlimactic—to—"

He laughed a little. He said, "I see what you mean."

They walked back to her home in silence. He didn't know whether it was happy

or unhappy silence; he was too mixed up for that.

On the shadowed porch, in front of the door, she turned and faced him. "George," she said. Silence.

"Oh, damn you, George; quit being so *noble* or whatever you're being. Unless, of course, you *don't* love me. Unless this is just an elaborate form of—of runaround you're giving me. Is it?"

There were only two things he could do. One was run like hell. The other was what he did. He put his arms around her and kissed her. Hungrily.

When that was over, and it wasn't over too quickly, he was breathing a little hard and not thinking too clearly, for he was saying what he hadn't meant to say at all, "I love you, Clare. I love you; I love you."

And she said, "I love you, too, dear. You'll come back to me, won't you?" And he said, "Yes. *Yes.*"

It was four miles or so from her home to his rooming house, but he walked, and the walk seemed to take only seconds.

He sat at the window of his room, with the light out, thinking, but the thoughts went in the same old circles they'd gone in for three years.

No new factor had been added except that now he was going to stick his neck out, way out, miles out. Maybe, just maybe, this thing was going to be settled one way or the other.

Out there, out his window, the stars were bright diamonds in the sky. Was one of them his star of destiny? If so, he was going to follow it, follow it even into the madhouse if it led there. Inside him was a deeply rooted conviction that this wasn't accident, that it wasn't coincidence that had led to his being asked to tell the truth under guise of falsehood.

His star of destiny.

*Brightly shining?* No, the phrase from his dreams did not refer to that; it was not an adjective phrase, but a noun. *The brightly shining?* What was *the brightly shining?*

And the red and the black? He'd thought of everything Charlie had suggested, and other things, too. Checkers, for instance. But it was not that.

The red and the black.

Well, whatever the answer was, he was running full-speed toward it now, not away from it.

After a while he went to bed, but it was a long time before he went to sleep.

## V

CHARLIE DOERR came out of the inner office marked Private and put his hand out. He said, "Good luck, George. The doc's ready to talk to you now."

He shook Charlie's hand and said, "You might as well run along. I'll see you Monday, first visiting day."

"I'll wait here," Charlie said. "I took the day off work anyway, remember? Besides, maybe you won't have to go."

He dropped Charlie's hand, and stared into Charlie's face. He said slowly, "What do you mean, Charlie—maybe I won't have to go."

"Why—" Charlie looked puzzled. "Why, maybe he'll tell you you're all right, or just suggest regular visits to see him until you're straightened out, or—" Charlie finished weakly, "—or something."

Unbelievingly, he stared at Charlie. He wanted to ask, am I crazy or are you, but that sounded crazy to ask under the circumstances. But he had to be sure, sure that Charlie just hadn't let something slip from his mind; maybe he'd fallen into the role he was supposed to be playing when he talked to the doctor just now. He asked, "Charlie, don't you remember that—" And even of that question the rest seemed insane for him to be asking, with Charlie staring blankly at him. The answer was in Charlie's face; it didn't have to be brought to Charlie's lips.

Charlie said again, "I'll wait, of course. Good luck, George."

He looked into Charlie's eyes and nodded, then turned and went through the door marked Private. He closed it behind him, meanwhile studying the man who had been sitting behind the desk and who had risen as he entered. A big man, broad shouldered, iron gray hair.

"Dr. Irving?"

"Yes, Mr. Vine. Will you be seated, please?"

He slid into the comfortable, padded armchair across the desk from the doctor.

"Mr. Vine," said the doctor, "a first interview of this sort is always a bit difficult. For the patient, I mean. Until you know me better, it will be difficult for you to overcome a certain natural reticence in discussing yourself. Would you prefer to talk, to tell things your own way, or would you rather I asked questions?"

He thought that over. He'd had a story ready, but those few words with Charlie in the waiting room had changed everything.

He said, "Perhaps you'd better ask questions."

"Very well." There was a pencil in Dr. Irving's hand and paper on the desk before him. "Where and when were you born?"

He took a deep breath. "To the best of my knowledge, in Corsica on August 15th, 1769. I don't actually remember being born, of course. I do remember things from my boyhood on Corsica, though. We stayed there until I was ten, and after that I was sent to school at Brienne."

Instead of writing, the doctor was tapping the paper lightly with the tip of the pencil. He asked, "What month and year is this?"

"August, 1947. Yes, I know that should make me a hundred and seventy-some years old. You want to know how I account for that. I don't. Nor do I account for the fact that Napoleon Bonaparte died in 1821."

He leaned back in the chair and crossed his arms, staring up at the ceiling. "I don't attempt to account for the paradoxes or the discrepancies. I recognize them as such. But according to my own memory, and aside from logic pro or con, I was Napoleon for twenty-seven years. I won't recount what happened during that time; it's all down in the history books.

"But in 1796, after the battle of Lodi, while I was in charge of the armies in Italy, I went to sleep. As far as I knew, just as anyone goes to sleep anywhere, any time. But I woke up—with no sense whatever of duration, by the way—in a hospital in town here, and I was informed that my name was George Vine, that the year was 1944, and that I was twenty-seven years old.

"The twenty-seven years old part checked, and that was all. Absolutely all. I have no recollections of any parts of George Vine's life, prior to his—my—waking up in the hospital after the accident. I know quite a bit about his early life now, but only because I've been told.

"I know when and where he was born, where he went to school, and when he started work at the *Blade*. I know when he enlisted in the army and when he was discharged—late in 1943—because I developed a trick knee after a leg injury. Not in combat, incidentally, and there wasn't any 'psycho-neurotic' on my—his—discharge."

The doctor quit doodling with the pencil. He asked, "You've felt this way for three years—and kept it a secret?"

"Yes. I had time to think things over after the accident, and yes, I decided then to accept what they told me about my identity. They'd have locked me up, of course. Incidentally, I've *tried* to figure out an answer. I've studied Dunne's theory of time—even Charles Fort!" He grinned suddenly. "Ever read about Casper Hauser?"

Dr. Irving nodded.

"Maybe he was playing smart the way I did. And I wonder how many other amnesiacs pretended they didn't know what happened prior to a certain date—rather than admit they had memories at obvious variance with the facts."

DR. IRVING said slowly, "Your cousin informs me that you were a bit—ah—'hipped' was his word—on the subject of Napoleon before your accident. How do you account for that?"

"I've told you I don't account for any of it. But I can verify that fact, aside from what Charlie Doerr says about it. Apparently I—the George Vine I, if I was ever George Vine—was quite interested in Napoleon, had read about him, made a hero of him, and had talked about him quite a bit. Enough so that the fellows he worked with at the *Blade* had nicknamed him 'Nappy.'"

"I notice you distinguish between yourself and George Vine. Are you or are you not he?"

"I have been for three years. Before that—I have no recollection of being George Vine. I don't think I was. I think—as

nearly as I think anything—that *I*, three years ago, woke up in George Vine's body."

"Having done what for a hundred and seventy some years?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. Incidentally, I don't doubt that this *is* George Vine's body, and with it I inherited his knowledge—except his personal memories. For example, I knew how to handle his job at the newspaper, although I didn't remember any of the people I worked with there. I have his knowledge of English, for instance, and his ability to write. I knew how to operate a typewriter. My handwriting is the same as his."

"If you think that you are not Vine, how do you account for that?"

He leaned forward. "I think part of me *is* George Vine, and part of me isn't. I think some transference has happened which is outside the run of ordinary human experience. That doesn't necessarily mean that it's supernatural—nor that I'm insane. *Does it?*"

Dr. Irving didn't answer. Instead, he asked, "You kept this secret for three years, for understandable reasons. Now, presumably for other reasons, you decide to tell. What are the other reasons? What has happened to change your attitude?"

It was the question that had been bothering him.

He said slowly, "Because I don't believe in coincidence. Because something in the situation itself has changed. Because I'm tired of pretending. Because I'm willing to risk imprisonment as a paranoic to find out the truth."

"What in the situation has changed?"

"Yesterday it was suggested—by my employer—that I feign insanity for a practical reason. And the very kind of insanity which I have, if any. Surely, I will admit the possibility that I'm insane. But I can only operate on the theory that I'm not. You know that you're Dr. Willard E. Irving; you can only operate on that theory—but how do you *know* you are? Maybe you're insane, but you can only act as though you're not."

"You think your employer is part of a plot—ah—against you? You think there is a conspiracy to get you into a sanitarium?"

"I don't know. Here's what has happened since yesterday noon." He took a deep breath. Then he plunged. He told Dr. Irving the whole story of his interview with Candler, what Candler had said about Dr. Randolph, about his talk with Charlie Doerr last night and about Charlie's bewildering about-face in the waiting room.

When he was through he said, "That's all." He looked at Dr. Irving's expressionless face with more curiosity than concern, trying to read it. He added, quite casually, "You don't believe me, of course. You think I'm insane."

HE MET Irving's eyes squarely. He said, "You have no choice—unless you would choose to believe I'm telling you an elaborate set of lies to convince you I'm insane. I mean, as a scientist and as a psychiatrist, you cannot even admit the possibility that the things I believe—*know*—are objectively true. Am I not right?"

"I fear that you are. So?"

"So go ahead and sign your commitment. I'm going to follow this thing through. Even to the detail of having Dr. Ellsworth Joyce Randolph sign the second one."

"You make no objection?"

"Would it do any good if I did?"

"On one point, yes, Mr. Vine. If a patient has a prejudice against—or a delusion concerning—one psychiatrist, it is best not to have him under that particular psychiatrist's care. If you think Dr. Randolph is concerned in a plot against you, I would suggest that another one be named."

He said softly, "Even if I choose Randolph?"

Dr. Irving waved a deprecating hand, "Of course, if both you and Mr. Doerr prefer—"

"We prefer."

The iron gray head nodded gravely. "Of course you understand one thing; if Dr. Randolph and I decide you should go to the sanitarium, it will not be for custodial care. It will be for your recovery through treatment."

He nodded.

Dr. Irving stood. "You'll pardon me a moment? I'll phone Dr. Randolph."

He watched Dr. Irving go through a door to an inner room. He thought; there's a

phone on his desk right there; but he doesn't want me to overhear the conversation.

He sat there very quietly until Irving came back and said, "Dr. Randolph is free. And I phoned for a cab to take us there. You'll pardon me again? I'd like to speak to your cousin, Mr. Doerr."

He sat there and didn't watch the doctor leave in the opposite direction for the waiting room. He could have gone to the door and tried to catch words in the low-voiced conversation, but he didn't. He just sat there until he heard the waiting room door open behind him and Charlie's voice said, "Come on, George. The cab will be waiting downstairs by now."

They went down in the elevator and the cab was there. Dr. Irving gave the address.

In the cab, about half way there, he said, "It's a beautiful day," and Charlie cleared his throat and said, "Yeah, it is." The rest of the way he didn't try it again and nobody said anything.

## VI

HE WORE gray trousers and a gray shirt, open at the collar and with no necktie that he might decide to hang himself with. No belt, either, for the same reason, although the trousers buttoned snugly enough around the waist that there was no danger of them falling off. Just as there was no danger of his falling out any of the windows; they were barred.

He was not in a cell, however; it was a large ward on the third floor. There were seven other men in the ward. His eyes ran over them. Two were playing checkers, sitting on the floor with the board on the floor between them. One sat in a chair, staring fixedly at nothing; two leaned against the bars of one of the open windows, looking out and talking casually and sanely. One read a magazine. One sat in a corner, playing smooth arpeggios on a piano that wasn't there at all.

He stood leaning against the wall, watching the other seven. He'd been here two hours now; it seemed like two years.

The interview with Dr. Ellsworth Joyce Randolph had gone smoothly; it had been practically a duplicate of his interview with Irving. And quite obviously, Dr. Randolph had never heard of him before.

He'd expected that, of course.

He felt very calm, now. For a while, he'd decided, he wasn't going to think, wasn't going to worry, wasn't even going to feel.

He strolled over and stood watching the checker game.

It was a sane checker game; the rules were being followed.

One of the men looked up and asked, "What's your name?" It was a perfectly sane question; the only thing wrong with it was that the same man had asked the same question four times now within the two hours he'd been here.

He said, "George Vine."

"Mine's Bassington, Ray Bassington. Call me Ray. Are you insane?"

"No."

"Some of us are and some of us aren't. He is." He looked at the man who was playing the imaginary piano. "Do you play checkers?"

"Not very well."

"Good. We eat pretty soon now. Anything you want to know, just ask me."

"How do you get out of here? Wait, I don't mean that for a gag, or anything. Seriously, what's the procedure?"

"You go in front of the board once a month. They ask you questions and decide if you go or stay. Sometimes they stick needles in you. What you down for?"

"Down for? What do you mean?"

"Feeble-minded, manic-depressive, dementia praecox, involutional melancholia—"

"Oh. Paranoia, I guess."

"That's bad. Then they stick needles in you."

A bell rang somewhere.

"That's dinner," said the other checker player. "Ever try to commit suicide? Or kill anyone?"

"No."

"They'll let you eat at an A table then, with knife and fork."

The door of the ward was being opened. It opened outward and a guard stood outside and said, "All right." They filed out,

all except the man who was sitting in the chair staring into space.

"How about him?" he asked Ray Bassington.

"He'll miss a meal tonight. Manic-depressive, just going into the depressive stage. They let you miss one meal; if you're not able to go to the next they take you and feed you. You a manic-depressive?"

"No."

"You're lucky. It's hell when you're on the down-swing. Here, through this door."

It was a big room. Tables and benches were crowded with men in gray shirts and gray trousers, like his. A guard grabbed his arm as he went through the doorway and said, "There. That seat."

It was right beside the door. There was a tin plate, messy with food, and a spoon beside it. He asked, "Don't I get a knife and fork? I was told—"

The guard gave him a shove toward the seat. "Observation period, seven days. Nobody gets silverware till their observation period's over. Siddown."

HE SAT down. No one at his table had silverware. All the others were eating, several of them noisily and messily. He kept his eyes on his own plate, unappetizing as that was. He toyed with his spoon and managed to eat a few pieces of potato out of the stew and one or two of the chunks of meat that were mostly lean.

The coffee was in a tin cup and he wondered why until he realized how breakable an ordinary cup would be and how lethal could be one of the heavy mugs cheap restaurants use.

The coffee was weak and cool; he couldn't drink it.

He sat back and closed his eyes. When he opened them again there was an empty plate and an empty cup in front of him and the man at his left was eating very rapidly. It was the man who'd been playing the non-existent piano.

He thought, if I'm here long enough, I'll get hungry enough to eat that stuff. He didn't like the thought of being there that long.

After a while a bell rang and they got up, one table at a time on signals he didn't catch, and filed out. His group had come in last; it went out first.

Ray Bassington was behind him on the stairs. He said, "You'll get used to it. What'd you say your name is?"

"George Vine."

Bassington laughed. The door shut on them from the outside.

He saw it was dark outside. He went over to one of the windows and stared out through the bars. There was a single bright star that showed just above the top of the elm tree in the yard. *His* star? Well, he'd followed it here. A cloud drifted across it.

Someone was standing beside him. He turned his head and saw it was the man who'd been playing piano. He had a dark, foreign-looking face with intense black eyes; just then he was smiling, as though at a secret joke.

"You're new here, aren't you? Or just get put in this ward, which?"

"New. George Vine's the name."

"Baroni. Musician. Used to be, anyway. Now—let it go. Anything you want to know about the place?"

"Sure. How to get out of it."

Baroni laughed, without particular amusement but not bitterly either. "First, convince them you're all right again. Mind telling what's wrong with you—or don't you want to talk about it? Some of us mind, others don't."

He looked at Baroni, wondering which way he felt. Finally he said, "I guess I don't mind. I—think I'm Napoleon."

"Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"*Are* you Napoleon? If you aren't, that's one thing. Then maybe you'll get out of here in six months or so. If you really *are*—that's bad. You'll probably die here."

"Why? I mean, if I *am*, then I'm sane and—"

"Not the point. Point's whether they think you're sane or not. Way they figure, if you think you're Napoleon you're not sane. Q. E. D. You stay here."

"Even if I tell them I'm convinced I'm George Vine?"

"They've worked with paranoia before. And that's what they've got you down for, count on it. And any time a paranoiac gets tired of a place, he'll try to lie his way out

of it. They weren't born yesterday. They know that."

"In general, yes, but how—"

A sudden cold chill went down his spine. He didn't have to finish the question. *They stick needles in you*— It hadn't meant anything when Ray Bassington had said it.

The dark man nodded. "Truth serum," he said. "When a paranoiac reaches the stage where he's cured *if* he's telling the truth, they make sure he's telling it before they let him go."

He thought, what a beautiful trap it had been that he'd walked into. He'd probably die here, now.

He leaned his head against the cool iron bars and closed his eyes. He heard footsteps walking away from him and knew he was alone.

He opened his eyes and looked out into blackness; now the clouds had drifted across the moon, too.

*Clare,* he thought; *Clare.*

A trap.

But—if there was a trap, there must be a trapper.

He was sane or he was insane. If he was sane, he'd walked into a trap, and *if there was a trap, there must be a trapper, or trappers.*

If he was insane—

God, let it be that he *was* insane. That way everything made such sweetly simple sense, and someday he might be out of here, he might go back to working for the *Blade,* possibly even with a memory of all the years he'd worked there. Or that George Vine had worked there.

That was the catch. *He* wasn't George Vine.

And there was another catch. He *wasn't* insane.

The cool iron of the bars against his forehead.

AFTER a while he heard the door open and looked around. Two guards had come in. A wild hope, reasonless, surged up inside him. It didn't last.

"Bedtime, you guys," said one of the guards. He looked at the manic-depressive sitting motionless on the chair and said, "Nuts. Hey, Bassington, help me get this guy in."

The other guard, a heavy-set man with hair close-cropped like a wrestler's, came over to the window.

"You. You're the new one in here. Vine, ain't it?"

He nodded.

"Want trouble, or going to be good?" Fingers of the guard's right hand clenched, the fist went back.

"Don't want trouble. Got enough."

The guard relaxed a little. "Okay, stick to that and you'll get along. Vacant bunk's in there." He pointed. "One on the right. Make it up yourself in the morning. Stay in the bunk and mind your own business. If there's any noise or trouble here in the ward, we come in and take care of it. Our own way. You wouldn't like it."

He didn't trust himself to speak, so he just nodded. He turned and went through the door of the cubicle to which the guard had pointed. There were two bunks in there; the manic-depressive who'd been on the chair was lying flat on his back on the other, staring blindly up at the ceiling through wide-open eyes. They'd pulled his slippers off, leaving him otherwise dressed.

He turned to his own bunk, knowing there was nothing on earth he could do for the other man, no way he could reach him through the impenetrable shell of blank misery which is the manic-depressive's intermittent companion.

He turned down a gray sheet-blanket on his own bunk and found under it another gray sheet-blanket atop a hard but smooth pad. He slipped off his shirt and trousers and hung them on a hook on the wall at the foot of his bed. He looked around for a switch to turn off the light overhead and couldn't find one. But, even as he looked, the light went out.

A single light still burned somewhere in the ward room outside, and by it he could see to take his shoes and socks off and get into the bunk.

He lay very quiet for a while, hearing only two sounds, both faint and seeming far away. Somewhere in another cubicle off the ward someone was singing quietly to himself, a wordless monody; somewhere else someone else was sobbing. In his own cubicle, he couldn't hear even the sound of breathing from his room mate.

Then there was a shuffle of bare feet and someone in the open doorway said, "George Vine."

He said, "Yes?"

"Shhh, not so loud. This is Bassington. Want to tell you about that guard; I should have warned you before. Don't ever tangle with him."

"I didn't."

"I heard; you were smart. He'll slug you to pieces if you give him half a chance. He's a sadist. A lot of guards are; that's why they're bughousers; that's what they call themselves, bughousers. If they get fired one place for being too brutal they get on at another one. He'll be in again in the morning; I thought I'd warn you."

The shadow in the doorway was gone.

He lay there in the dimness, the almost-darkness, feeling rather than thinking. Wondering. Did mad people ever know that they were mad? Could they tell? Was every one of them sure, as he was sure—?

That quiet, still thing lying in the bunk near his, inarticulately suffering, withdrawn from human reach into a profound misery beyond the understanding of the sane—

"Napoleon Bonaparte!"

A clear voice, but had it been within his mind, or from without? He sat up on the bunk. His eyes pierced the dimness, could discern no form, no shadow, in the doorway.

He said, "Yes?"

## VII

ONLY then, sitting up on the bunk and having answered "Yes," did he realize the name by which the voice had called him.

"Get up. Dress."

He swung his legs out over the edge of the bunk, stood up. He reached for his shirt and was slipping his arms into it before he stopped and asked, "Why?"

"To learn the truth."

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Do not speak aloud. I can hear you. I am within you and without. I have no name."

"Then *what* are you?" He said it aloud, without thinking.

"An instrument of The Brightly Shining."

He dropped the trousers he'd been holding. He sat down carefully on the edge of the bunk, leaned over and groped around for them.

His mind groped, too. Groped for he knew not what. Finally he found a question —*the* question. He didn't ask it aloud this time; he thought it, concentrated on it as he straightened out his trousers and thrust his legs in them.

*"Am I mad?"*

The answer—*No*—came clear and sharp as a spoken word, but had it been spoken? Or was it a sound that was only in his mind?

He found his shoes and pulled them on his feet. As he fumbled the laces into some sort of knots, he thought, "Who—what—is The Brightly Shining?"

"The Brightly Shining is *that which is Earth*. It is the intelligence of our planet. It is one of three intelligences in the solar system, one of many in the universe. Earth is one; it is called The Brightly Shining."

"I do not understand," he thought.

"You will. Are you ready?"

He finished the second knot. He stood up. The voice said, "Come. Walk silently."

It was as though he was being led through the almost-darkness, although he felt no physical touch upon him; he saw no physical presence beside him. But he walked confidently, although quietly on tiptoe, knowing he would not walk into anything nor stumble. Through the big room that was the ward, and then his outstretched hand touched the knob of a door.

He turned it gently and the door opened inward. Light blinded him. The voice said, "Wait," and he stood immobile. He could hear sound—the rustle of paper, the turn of a page—outside the door, in the lighted corridor.

Then from across the hall came the sound of a shrill scream. A chair scraped and feet hit the floor of the corridor, walking away toward the sound of the scream. A door opened and closed.

The voice said, "Come," and he pulled the door open the rest of the way and went outside, past the desk and the empty chair that had been just outside the door of the ward.

Another door, another corridor. The voice said, "Wait," the voice said, "Come"; this

time a guard slept. He tiptoed past. Down steps.

He thought the question, "Where am I going?"

"Mad," said the voice.

"But you said I wasn't—" He'd spoken aloud and the sound startled him almost more than had the answer to his last question. And in the silence that followed the words he'd spoken there came—from the bottom of the stairs and around the corner—the sound of a buzzing switchboard, and someone said, "Yes? . . . Okay, Doctor, I'll be right up." Footsteps and the closing of an elevator door.

He went down the remaining stairs and around the corner and he was in the front main hall. There was an empty desk with a switchboard beside it. He walked past it and to the front door. It was bolted and he threw the heavy bolt.

He went outside, into the night.

He walked quietly across cement, across gravel; then his shoes were on grass and he didn't have to tiptoe any more. It was as dark now as the inside of an elephant; he felt the presence of trees nearby and leaves brushed his face occasionally, but he walked rapidly, confidently and his hand went forward just in time to touch a brick wall.

He reached up and he could touch the top of it; he pulled himself up and over it. There was broken glass on the flat top of the wall; he cut his clothes and his flesh badly, but he felt no pain, only the wetness of blood and the stickiness of blood.

HE WALKED along a lighted road, he walked along dark and empty streets, he walked down a darker alley. He opened the back gate of a yard and walked to the back door of a house. He opened the door and went in. There was a lighted room at the front of the house; he could see the rectangle of light at the end of a corridor. He went along the corridor and into the lighted room.

Someone who had been seated at a desk stood up. Someone, a man, whose face he knew but whom he could not—

"Yes," said the man, smiling, "you know me, but you do not know me. Your mind is under partial control and your ability to recognize me is blocked out. Other than that and your analgesia—you are covered with blood from the glass on the wall, but you don't feel any pain—your mind is normal and you are sane."

"What's it all about?" he asked. "Why was I brought here?"

"Because you are sane. I'm sorry about that, because you can't be. It is not so much that you retained memory of your previous life, after you'd been moved. That happens. It is that you somehow know something of what you shouldn't—something of The Brightly Shining, and of the Game between the red and the black. For that reason—"

"For that reason, what?" he asked.

The man he knew and did not know smiled gently. "For that reason you must know the rest, so that you will know nothing at all. For everything will add to nothing. The truth will drive you mad."

"That I do not believe."

"Of course you don't. If the truth were conceivable to you, it would not drive you mad. But you cannot remotely conceive the truth."

A powerful anger surged up within him. He stared at the familiar face that he knew and did not know, and he stared down at himself; at the torn and bloody gray uniform, at his torn and bloody hands. The hands hooked like claws with the desire to kill—someone, the someone, whoever it was, who stood before him.

He asked, "What are you?"

"I am an instrument of The Brightly Shining."

"The same which led me here, or another?"

"One is all, all is one. Within the whole and its parts, there is no difference. One instrument is another and the red is the black and the black is the white and there is no difference. The Brightly Shining is the soul of Earth. I use *soul* as the nearest word in your vocabulary."

Hatred was almost a bright light. It was almost something that he could lean into, lean his weight against.

He asked, "What is The Brightly Shining?" He made the words a curse in his mouth.

"Knowing will make you mad. You want to know?"

"Yes." He made a curse out of that simple, sibilant syllable.

The lights were dimming. Or was it his eyes? The room was becoming dimmer, and at the same time receding. It was becoming a tiny cube of dim light, seen from afar and outside, from somewhere in the distant dark, ever receding, turning into a pinpoint of light, and within that point of light ever the hated Thing, the man—or was it a man?—standing beside the desk.

Into darkness, into space, up and apart from the earth—a dim sphere in the night, a receding sphere outlined against the spangled blackness of eternal space, occulting the stars, a disk of black.

It stopped receding, and time stopped. It was as though the clock of the universe stood still. Beside him, out of the void, spoke the voice of the instrument of The Shining One.

"Behold," it said. "The Being of Earth."

He beheld. Not as though an outward change was occurring, but an inward one, as though his senses were being changed to enable him to perceive something hitherto unseeable.

The ball that was Earth began to glow. Brightly to shine.

"You see the intelligence that rules Earth," said the voice. "The sum of the black and the white and the red, that are one, divided only as the lobes of a brain are divided, the trinity that is one."

The glowing ball and the stars behind it faded, and the darkness became deeper darkness and then there was dim light, growing brighter, and he was back in the room with the man standing at the desk.

"You saw," said the man whom he hated. "But you do not understand. You ask, *what* you have seen, *what* is The Brightly Shining? It is a group intelligence, the true intelligence of Earth, one intelligence among three in the Solar system, one among many in the universe.

"What, then, is man? Men are pawns, in games of—to you—unbelievable complexity, between the red and the black, the white and the black, for amusement. Played by one part of an organism against another part, to while away an instant of eternity. There are vaster games, played between galaxies. Not with man.

"Man is a parasite peculiar to Earth, which tolerates his presence for a little while. He exists nowhere else in the cosmos, and he does not exist here for long. A little while, a few chessboard wars, which he thinks he fights himself— You begin to understand."

The man at the desk smiled.

"You want to know of yourself. Nothing is less important. A move was made, before Lodi. The opportunity was there for a move of the red; a stronger, more ruthless personality was needed; it was a turning point in history—which means in the game. Do you understand now? A pinch-hitter was put in to become Emperor."

He managed two words. "And then?"

"The Brightly Shining does not kill. You had to be put somewhere, some time. Long later a man named George Vine was killed in an accident; his body was still usable. George Vine had not been insane, but he had had a Napoleonic complex. The transference was amusing."

"No doubt." Again it was impossible to reach the man at the desk. The hatred itself was a wall between them. "Then George Vine is dead?"

"Yes. And you, because you knew a little too much, must go mad so that you will know nothing. Knowing the truth will drive you mad."

"No!"

The instrument smiled.

## VIII

THE room, the cube of light, dimmed; it seemed to tilt. Still standing, he was going over backward, his position becoming horizontal instead of vertical.

His weight was on his back and under him was the soft-hard smoothness of his bunk, the roughness of a gray sheet blanket. And he could move; he sat up.

He had been dreaming? Had he really been outside the asylum? He held up his hands, touched one to the other, and they were wet with something sticky. So was the front of his shirt and the thighs and knees of his trousers.

And his shoes were on.

The blood was there from climbing the wall. And now the analgesia was leaving, and pain was beginning to come into his

hands, his chest, his stomach and his legs. Sharp biting pain.

He said aloud, *"I am not mad. I am not mad."* Was he screaming it?

A voice said, "No. Not yet." Was it the voice that had been here in the room before? Or was it the voice of the man who had stood in the lighted room? Or had both been the same voice?

It said, "Ask, 'What is man?' "

Mechanically, he asked it.

"Man is a blind alley in evolution, who came too late to compete, who has always been controlled and played with by The Brightly Shining, which was old and wise before man walked erect.

"Man is a parasite upon a planet populated before he came, populated by a Being that is one and many, a billion cells but a single mind, a single intelligence, a single will—as is true of every other populated planet in the universe.

"Man is a joke, a clown, a parasite. He is nothing; he will be less."

*"Come and go mad."*

He was getting out of bed again; he was walking. Through the doorway of the cubicle, along the ward. To the door that led to the corridor; a thin crack of light showed under it. But this time his hand did not reach out for the knob. Instead he stood there facing the closed door, and it began to glow; slowly it became light and visible.

As though from somewhere an invisible spotlight played upon it, the door became a visible rectangle in the surrounding blackness; as brightly visible as the crack under it.

The voice said, "You see before you a cell of your ruler, a cell unintelligent in itself, yet a tiny part of a unit which is intelligent, one of a million units which make up *the* intelligence which rules the earth—and you. And which earth-wide intelligence is one of a million intelligences which rule the universe."

"The *door?* I don't—"

The voice spoke no more; it had withdrawn, but somehow inside his mind was the echo of silent laughter.

He leaned closer and saw what he was meant to see. An ant was crawling up the door.

His eyes followed it, and numbing horror crawled apace, up his spine. A hundred things that had been told and shown him suddenly fitted into a pattern, a pattern of sheer horror. The black, the white, the red; the black ants, the white ants, the red ants; the players with men, separate lobes of a single group brain, the intelligence that was one. Man an accident, a parasite, a pawn; a million planets in the universe inhabited each by an insect race that was a single intelligence for the planet—and all the intelligences together were the single cosmic intelligence that was—*God!*

The one-syllable word wouldn't come.

He went mad, instead.

He beat upon the now-dark door with his bloody hands, with his knees, his face, with himself, although already he had forgotten why, had forgotten what he wanted to crush.

He was raving mad—dementia praecox, not paranoia—when they released his body by putting it into a strait jacket, released it from frenzy to quietude.

He was quietly mad—paranoia, not dementia praecox—when they released him as sane eleven months later.

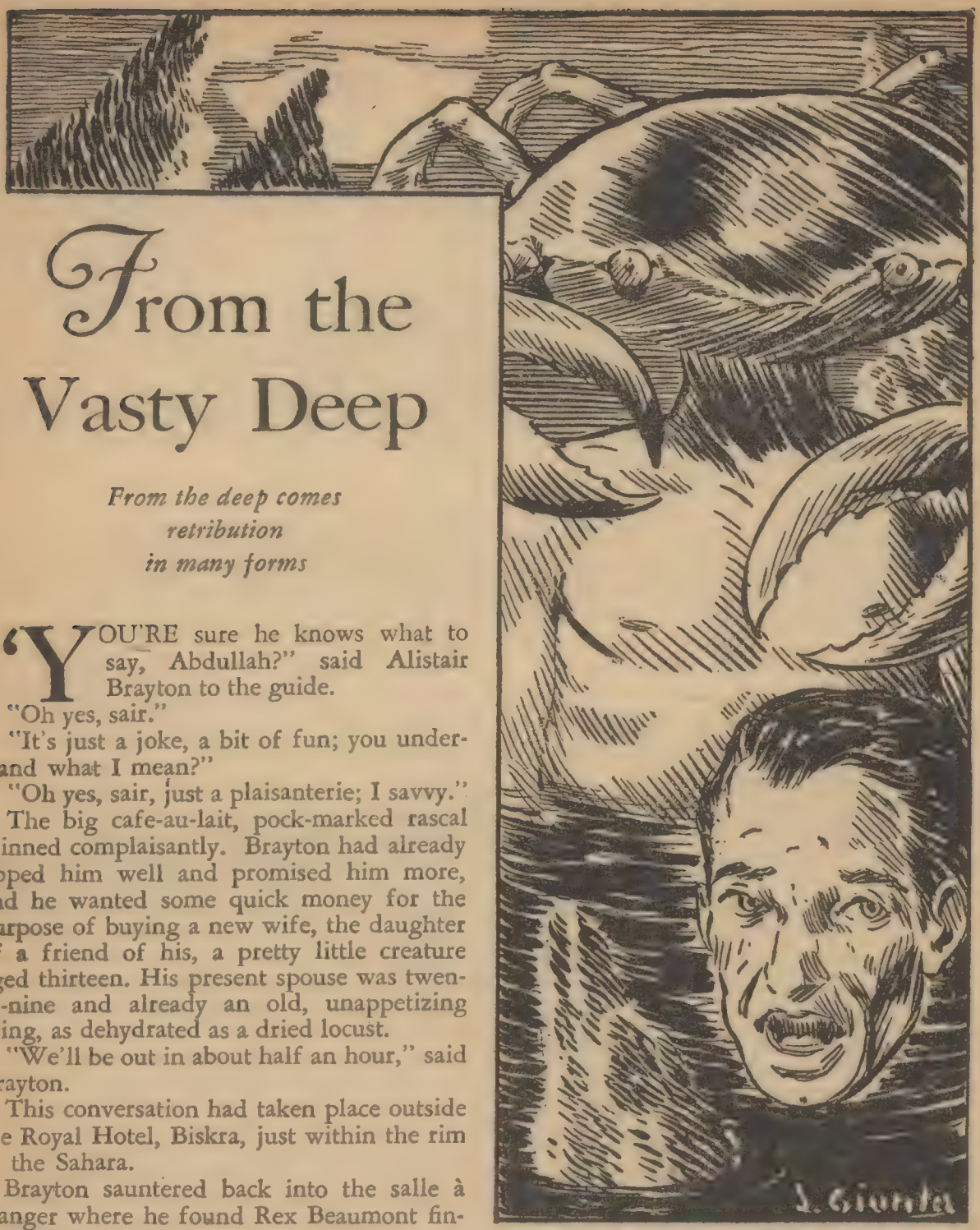
Paranoia, you see, is a peculiar affliction; it has no physical symptoms, it is merely the presence of a fixed delusion. A series of metrazol shocks had cleared up the dementia praecox and left only the fixed delusion that he was George Vine, a reporter.

The asylum authorities thought he was, too, so the delusion was not recognized as such and they released him and gave him a certificate to prove he was sane.

He married Clare; he still works at the *Blade*—for a man named Candler. He still plays chess with his cousin, Charlie Doerr. He still sees—for periodic checkups—both Dr. Irving and Dr. Randolph.

Which of them smiles inwardly? What good would it do you to know? Yes it was, is, one of those four.

It doesn't matter. Don't you understand?: Nothing matters!




# From the Vasty Deep

*From the deep comes retribution in many forms*

"YOU'RE sure he knows what to say, Abdullah?" said Alistair Brayton to the guide.

"Oh yes, sair."

"It's just a joke, a bit of fun; you understand what I mean?"

"Oh yes, sair, just a plaisanterie; I savvy."

The big cafe-au-lait, pock-marked rascal grinned complaisantly. Brayton had already tipped him well and promised him more, and he wanted some quick money for the purpose of buying a new wife, the daughter of a friend of his, a pretty little creature aged thirteen. His present spouse was twenty-nine and already an old, unappetizing thing, as dehydrated as a dried locust.

"We'll be out in about half an hour," said Brayton.

This conversation had taken place outside the Royal Hotel, Biskra, just within the rim of the Sahara.

Brayton sauntered back into the salle à manger where he found Rex Beaumont finishing his breakfast.

"Have you eaten?" asked Beaumont.

"Yes, some time ago."

"You were up early!"

"Yes, the sun blazes right into my room."

Their tones were cordial and their mutual antipathy nearly perfectly concealed. That intensely reciprocated dislike was of long standing, perhaps sufficiently explained by

*BY*

*H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD*

**Heading by John Giunta**

the fact that they were beyond any argument the two leading actors on the contemporary British stage. In fact Beaumont was probably the best mummer in the world, for he had starred in some very good pictures. Their rivalry was bitterly exacerbated by the ferocious partisanship of their respective cliques. Brayton was thirty-six and Beaumont thirty-nine, and those three cursed years plagued his soul. Forty was *such* a milestone, *mill*stone almost to that cynosure of a myriad female eyes.

He was indeed a very handsome comely fellow, dark, slim, lithe and a beautiful mover on the stage. He possessed "classic" features, an intense, somewhat sinister expression, a powerful and dominating eye, mellifluous voice, and, above all that, he was a most accomplished and versatile craftsman. His Iago, both Richards, Antony, Volpone and Shotover were superb, and he was equally esteemed in modern comedy. But he had found a gray hair six months before; that very morning, in the light of the pitiless desert sun, he had spotted several thriving and minatory colonies, and dyeing was a stark reminder of death.

Brayton was a mighty charmer, too, big, blond, smiling, full of red blood coursing radiantly; equipped with a fine resonant baritone and a marvelous sense of character. He filled a stage and held the eye hypnotically. A superlative Macbeth, Othello, Undershaft, and both Caesars. He almost did the impossible with Falstaff, and, indeed, he never really failed; it was not in his character.

Their rivalry was inept and superfluous, for there was plenty of room for both and they clashed in no way, but there it was, and that is the way of things in that logically lawless profession.

Both were vain men, but Brayton's vanity found expression chiefly in praise of himself, Brayton's in dispraise of others Beaumont was, however, deemed by his colleagues far the better character of the two, a generous and considerate employer, fair-minded, and with a sense of humor sufficiently developed to disinfect and restrain his little failings; and after all, no great actor is ever *quite* human, everyone agreed.

Brayton was generally rated a false bonhomme, catty, uncertain-tempered, inclined to malice and tight in money matters. His nickname in the profession was "Billy Bennett" after a famous comedian whose self-composed description was "almost a gentleman." This judgment was probably a bit harsh and superficial. He was a medium, in a sense only another word for a great character actor—fundamentally a simple, rather impercipient, unanalytic man, with very little personality of his own, being perpetually "possessed" by the "souls" created by others; and, like most mediums, unscrupulous; amoral rather than bad. He did his stuff very well, and his irresistible smile got his fans vapouring with rapture. Neither was married, both preferring a frequent change of leading lady.

A last very important point, Beaumont was now "Sir Rex," having been knighted a few weeks before in the New Year Honours. Brayton had not yet recovered from that fearful right to the solar plexus.

THEIR meeting in Biskra was, of course, accidental; Beaumont, on holiday at Algiers, had decided to have a look at the desert before going home. Brayton had been yachting in the Mediterranean, got bored and seasick and flown down from the Riviera.

The night before they had arranged with the local Sand-Diviner to have their fortunes told by him at ten that morning. Both men were extremely superstitious. Most gamblers share this frailty as a badge of their tribe, and anyone who relies for fame and fortune on the fickle and callous mob—chiefly female mob—is a "plunger" indeed.

Brayton now reminded Beaumont of this date.

"Oh yes," he said, "I haven't forgotten. One of these days, perhaps, I shall cure myself of this puerile craving for the reassurance of magicians; they've had a lot of my money and habitually contradict each other."

"Well, come on," laughed Brayton, "and let us see what this professor of the mantic art has to tell us."

Beaumont put on his hat and followed him out of the hotel to where Abdullah was awaiting them. He salaamed in his oily, yet subtly disrespectful way. They had not far to go, the seer's pitch was only a

hundred yards down the road at the entrance to the little bazaar. As they proceeded, Abdullah kept up a repeated cry of "Imshi" as he shooed away the septic beggars and precociously lewd small boys.

The Sandman was squatting down behind a porphyry bowl three-quarters filled with soiled sand. He was clad in a burnoose over a tiny, grimy pair of linen pants. He looked half as old as time and his face was the color and texture of a swan's paddle, a dark sallow gray etched with a web of tiny lines and wrinkles. He took no notice of them as they halted beside him, nor to some remark of Abdullah's, but continued apparently aimlessly, to stir the sand with a skinny, arid forefinger. This nonchalance was part of his "act," thought Brayton. Abdullah spoke to him again in Arabic and then asked Beaumont to step forward in front of the bowl. For about half a minute the old man went on scrabbling in the sand more slowly now, less aimlessly and seemingly in a more concentrated way. And then presently he mumbled a short sentence. Abdullah spoke to him interrogatively and he replied again.

He seemed out of temper.

"Well?" said Beaumont.

"It is not very good news, I fear," smiled Abdullah.

"Never mind, let's have it," said Beaumont uneasily and with a forced smile.

"He say gentleman have not one year to go."

"To go! Go where?" asked Beaumont sharply.

"He mean to go on living, I think," replied Abdullah smiling and giving Brayton a quick glance.

Beaumont flushed and gave a clipped, uneasy laugh. "That's nice of him," he said. "Is that all he has to tell me?"

"That is all," replied Abdullah.

"Well, its your turn," said Beaumont to Brayton. He was obviously much disconcerted. He took off his hat and mopped his forehead.

Brayton moved forward and took his place before the bowl. Again the old man scrabbled in the sand for a while, and then looked up suddenly and for the first time. There was a look of extreme malevolence in his vulture eyes. Then he spoke a very long sentence. Abdullah looked baffled and the two of them had a short tart colloquy. At length Abdullah shrugged his shoulders and said, "It is difficult to savvy what he say. He say you will meet other gentleman at a feast and then by the sea, and then Allah will be very good to you. I dunno what he mean. He say he finish now."

THE seance was over. Beaumont immediately excused himself and hurried away. Brayton handed Abdullah a roll of notes. "It was just a joke, of course," he said quickly. "I'll tell the other gentleman it was just a joke before he leaves."

Abdullah smiled, salaamed, gave some of the notes to the Sandman, who took them without a word.

"He is angry," said Abdullah, "he does not like doing such things. He believes he see *true* things in the sand."

"Well, tell him it was only a little joke," muttered Brayton, "and that I'll put it right." He walked away leaving them together.

He had, of course, by bribery and corruption deliberately queered the prophetic pitch, moved by one of those sudden, malicious impulses which had contributed so much to his unpopularity. He had just wanted to give that conceited, over-rated person, Beaumont, a bit of a shock, a jolt. Well, he had done that, all right—quite obviously. Now he had better repair the damage. If he could have met him at once he would probably have done so, but he was not to be found till lunch-time, and by then Brayton had had time to think it over. When explained, it would look such a *very* poor joke, one requiring rather a lot of difficult explanation. He knew Beaumont would be furious and certainly spread the story when he got back to London. That would not do him any good. "Just typical of the blighter!" would be the general verdict. Whereas, if he kept his mouth shut, Beaumont would soon forget all about it, of course. No, he felt he just could not bring himself to confess and humiliate himself to such a spoilt, vain, over-rated person as "Sir Rex"; everyone knew how he had worked and wangled for that knighthood! His sense of guilt intensified his hate, so spreading

and thinning his good impulse till it was impotent. No, he would let it go!

There was a famous Parisian nerve specialist staying in the hotel, a man of formidable presence, patriarchial beard and piercing sardonic eye. Beaumont asked him to lunch at their table, not feeling in the mood for a "head-to-head" alone with Brayton. He was too full of that sombre oracle to keep it to himself, and presently told the Frenchman, in a failed-facetious way, what the Sandman had divined. The specialist was not deceived and set himself to undo what might well, he saw, be a serious mischief.

"Do not alarm yourself, Sir Rex," he said with a smile; "let me assure you the future *does not exist,* and precognition of all modes is pure fake, as you would put it, and a logical absurdity."

"Yet such foreseeing has a very long history," remarked Brayton, and then wished he hadn't. The Frenchman glanced at him in a cold appraising way. Brayton could not meet his eye.

"Yes, indeed," he replied, "and so have a myriad other childish superstitions. I have read your English philosopher, Dunne, for example. His *Time* is grossly spacial, his *Serial Selves,* the product of a radical psychological confusion, and his *evidence, pour rire.* Let me tell you all such stuff—prophetic dreams, palmistry, crystal-gazing, and this sand nonsense — is all part of the clever charlatan's stock-in-trade. I say *clever* because some of them are endowed with a peculiar faculty. Let me give an example of what I mean. I am very musical, but what is called absolute pitch, the immediate intuitive recognition of all the relationships of a note, is a profound mystery to me. Now these magicians have an equally strange power, called clairvoyance, which is really nothing but just an immediate, intuitive recognition, not of a *note,* but of a *man* from his face and general deportment. *Deportment* is not quite the word, but you will understand what I mean. By means of it they can make very good guesses as to a man's past, and even his future. In fact I myself have some small gift of this kind. It is a true faculty, but never results in more than a clever guess; there is nothing occult about it whatsover. No, be reassured, Sir Rex, I say with the utmost emphasis the *future does not exist,* and that is the only thing we can know about it. I must say I am surprised at that Sand-Fellow, he is usually more discreet in his humbug."

"He made a highly nebulous divination about me," said Brayton, "and ended up by saying 'And then Allah will be very good to you.' What did he mean by that?"

The Frenchman paused before replying and then said very stiffly, "I do not know, Mr. Brayton, the expression is not familiar to me. Forget all his nonsense, both of you!"

"He's lying, I think," said Brayton to himself. "Anyway Beaumont won't worry any more. That lets me out!"

But he was wrong. Beaumont remained depressed and full of foreboding. Why *hadn't* the Sand-Diviner been more discreet and pronounced the usual smooth things? Because he profoundly believed in the truth of his grim oracle and wished to warn his client. So Beaumont argued. He had always been physically robust enough, but his nervous system was innately fragile, and had been for some time flawed by over-work. He had a heavy programme ahead of him and had been worrying about the maze of detail involved in it during his holiday, which had consequently done him little good. He was in no state to out-face any further strain on his psyche. So Brayton's "joke" had stabbed deep through an impaired organism, and one by nature highly vulnerable to such a thrust.

HIS first role to tackle was the Inquisitor in *Saint Joan* in which he was as good as any Englishman could hope to be. He started re-studying it, and found to his intense dismay that he could not memorize the great speech at the trial. He "fluffed" time after time and always at the same place. He cancelled the revival because he was hopeless. His doctor recommended six months' complete rest, "But what is the use of that," he thought to himself, "when I have less than eleven months at the best to live!" Still he listlessly took the holiday, a sea voyage round the world.

Unluckily he went alone save for one companion, John Barleycorn. That boon comrade and he became inseparable. "Why not," he

told himself, "if I am doomed!" Of course he got no better. In fact he threw himself overboard on the last night before the ship reached Southampton and though they searched for a while, they could not find his body.

When Brayton heard of it he felt very, very badly. Indeed he had been greatly troubled ever since Beaumont had broken down. He kept wanting to tell him it had been a joke, but he just could not. He could not say it to his face and he could not write it. He could go so far as getting writing-paper and shaking his fountain pen, but he could write nothing. He could look down at the paper and see in his mind's eye the letter coming into spectral being line by line, but he could not write it. This had been getting on his nerves. When Beaumont jumped overboard he shut himself up in his room to think. And he had begun to make a confidant of John Barleycorn, too. Of course he had not been responsible for Rex's over-work and break-down, but he knew that some people, if they knew about the "joke," would have called him a murderer and nothing less. It was very lucky no one *did* know—in a way. In another way he would have liked to have got it off his chest. Why had he ever done it? Because Rex's conceit had disgusted him and, yes, because he had got that *knighthood*. Yes, *that* was it. *That* had done it. That's what he wanted to get off his chest and confess loudly and bravely. "It was a lousy trick, a silly, sudden, sodden notion. I was off-balance when I did it and I hadn't the guts to confess to Rex." But he could not face it. It would ruin him, his many enemies would see to that. "I wish to hell I'd never done it, though! It's done me no good and that's a certainty. Actually I miss Rex. I can see now the rivalry between us stimulated me. The bell has tolled for me, too. It was a rotten thing to do."

Whether this belated remorse was due to a sense of sin or a feeling of vague nervous discomfort is doubtful, but he can be given the benefit of it, and, perhaps, after all, the two emotions are pretty much the same.

Certainly it did not, as he had hoped, wear thinner. Rather it steadily intensified, for he was very superstitious, too. He could not get Rex out of his mind, especially as he began dreaming about him and, what was worse, always the same dream. He was standing on a beach gazing out to sea over some rocks. The sea was breaking lightly over the rocks and he was looking for something he knew he did not want to see. He stared hard, watching the lift of each small wave. Presently he saw something white rise on a crest, surge forward and disappear. There it was again, a bit nearer this time, and the next time and the next. And then whatever this was reached the rocks. He wanted to run away but he could not move. Then he saw it climb up on the rocks and come toward him and it was something like a naked man, only there was a difference. For instance where the face should have been, he presently could see was the big ochre shell of a crab, and he could see the claws moving, and that was the worst of all. Just then he always woke up. He had a pretty good idea what that thing was.

IT CAN be imagined that knowing he was going to have this dream, or being almost sure of it, made going to bed a daunting business for Brayton, because it filled him with a great horror, and he was sweating all over and feeling very sick when he woke up. It was not always as clear as has been described, and he had an idea that the more he'd drunk the less clear it was; so he naturally drank a lot just before turning out the light. And after a time he did not turn out the light at all.

Then there was another bother. He was rehearsing *Macbeth,* his best part, now ripe for revival. He had a great natural sympathy for Macbeth with his huge amibition and also his ghostly fears. If the end was the integration of a superior personality and the satisfaction of its potent, clamant rights, then any means were justified; and, again, such a great man was a natural focus round which the Fates—materialized and conflicting tendencies—should gather. He could call spirits from the Vasty Deep and they *would* come when he did call for them. Something like that. Now, however, he saw there was a good deal to be said for Duncan's point of view. Remorse partly and partly, perhaps, that very phrase, "the Vasty Deep" had something to do with it.

THE back parts of theatres during the throes of rehearsal of a big play like *Macbeth* are crowded, scurrying places; chaos to the uninitiated, but really that odd, motley section of humanity on the move about its business is a good example of organized division of labor. Brayton was, of course, quite at home in this come-and-go and could perfectly distinguish the wood from the trees, the combined effort from the atoms composing it.

Yet one of these "trees" began to worry him. Whether it was in a group of scene-shifters, or Scottish Noblemen, or the orchestra, or any grouped bodies contributing to the enterprise, an intruder was sometimes to be seen furtively lurking; very furtively, for the moment Brayton got him properly in his gaze, or rather just before he succeeded in doing so, he at once dissolved and disappeared, presently to reappear elsewhere. During one rehearsal he saw him for a second watching from the Royal Box. The curtains of the box were of light ochre silk and Brayton noticed a certain resemblance.

Of course his colleagues noticed something was the matter with Billy Bennett and whispered and wondered, but they had to confess he had never acted better. He was word perfect and never more moving and intense; the tortured Thane and he seemed absolutely one in spirit indomitably defying all the legions of Earth and Hell and Heaven.

For the first night he plugged himself with as much Scotch courage as he dared, and Dulcinea Delavere, the Lady Macbeth, turned up her nose when she accepted his bouquet and hoped for the best. It certainly was the best; he had never given such a terrific performance, in spite of, perhaps partly on account of, the fact that there was someone who had no business to be there, standing for a flash in the shadows behind the weird sisters, and then entering for a second with Duncan's retinue, and just visible out of the corner of his eye as he tried to seize the phantom dagger. But he was very near breaking-point in the banquet scene, for when he and his lady were surveying the assembled guests and the ghost of Banquo should have entered, it was not Banquo who came in, but someone Brayton had seen terribly often coming towards him across the rocks.

"Which of you have done this?" he cried, and pretty well everyone in the audience felt a quick, damp fear break out on them at the way he spoke that mighty line. Dulcinea, who was watching his face as he spoke it, says she knows she will never forget it, but hopes very much she is wrong.

TO THE audience he seemed entranced and inspired in the true sense of the word, breathing in unearthly air. Indeed at the end of the act the famous critic, Charles Straker, who almost always treats plays and actors as cats treat mice, first lying in wait for them, then playing sadistically with them for a while, and finally driving his claws right home in them, declared loudly in the bar it was the greatest piece of acting he had ever seen and that he'd almost have paid for his seat to witness it. But it wasn't acting, something had snapped in Brayton's brain and he was only vaguely conscious of where he was or what he was doing. However, he carried through to the end, and the expression on his face during the last scene was almost more than the people in the stalls could bear.

When the curtain come down, there was someone waiting for him in the wings. He ran from the stage, floored his dresser with a brutal blow, flung off his motley and dashed from the theatre. He was last seen alive running into Trafalgar Square.

Some mornings later, a prawn fisherman, who was netting the rock pools off Ventnor in the Isle of Wight, came to one of these pools just surrendered by a savage ebbing tide. He peered hard for a moment, and then started to run back to the beach.

The doctor said Brayton had been dead for about three days. The other body, which was resting up against Brayton's, had been dead for very much longer. That body was never certainly identified.

The prawn fisherman said in the pub on the evening of the day he made his discovery: "One thing I'll swear; I'll never eat crab again! Pity, as I liked it more than most things. But not after that!"

# The Blue Spectacles

BY STEPHEN GRENDON

WHEN he reached Cartagena, Jesse Brennan knew that his traveling was done. He was old, he was tired, and his illness had finally become too burdensome; he could not go on. A doctor confirmed it: he had perhaps a month to live, perhaps not that. Cartagena was sunny and warm; the Atlantic shone cobalt from dawn to dusk; the ancient walls of the old Colombian city pleased him. He had done more than one man's share of exploring, of poking about in the old places and the odd corners of the earth; he had no one to mourn him but a few old friends scattered over the globe; he might as well die in Cartagena as anywhere. Back home in the United States it would be winter now, and he had no taste for winter—better the sun and the cloudless sky and the restless sea.

There remained the problem of disposing of those trifles he had collected—the things of value to fellow collectors. He set about this without delay, so that the burden of thinking about this final task might not cloud his last days. The stone clock of mysterious Indian origin could go to Faulkner in Cairo. Stuart could have the old German book bound in human skin. Rawlings, a hermit in his Edinburgh garret, would enjoy the curious figurines from Burma, and Vac-

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

*Only a man whose soul is untouched by sin dares gaze through the blue glass*

lav would find Prague more interesting if he were the possessor of the Borgia ring. But to whom to send the blue spectacles? Ah, that was a problem! The old Chinese mandarin from whom he had got them had been convincingly solemn about the wonderful properties of the spectacles. Where, he wondered, could he find a man whose soul was "untouched" by sin, lest, by gazing through the blue glass something should befall him?

He thought about the disposal of the blue spectacles for two days. After he had packed and shipped everything else, the spectacles remained. But then, in the night, under a guileless moon, it came to him: Alain Verneil, of course! Too honest for his own good, too sincere to recognize hypocrisy, faithful, dogged, moral—yes, the blue spectacles would be safe with him, if indeed they had any of the properties attributed to them. He did not remember Verneil's address, nor could he find it anywhere in his things, but Verneil had been curator of some sort of museum in New Orleans, and he would doubtless be in the directory; so he did up the spectacles in a compact box, wrote a letter to enclose with his gift—"I got these from an old Chinese in Tibet. How old they are I don't know; he didn't know, either.

"They are reputed to be magic, in a peculiar way. If anyone who is not wholly good looks through them something will happen to him—I gather that he will be given sight of himself in some previous incarnation or time or something of that sort, and that it will not be pleasant. Or a change of identity in which punishment shall fit his crimes—you know how these legends go. I am almost ashamed to confess that the old fellow was so convincing that I myself never wore them. I was never 'good,' much less 'wholly good,' and at this stage there is hardly any use lying about that, is there?" —addressed it to Alain Verneil, New Orleans, Louisiana, U. S. A., scrawled across one corner of the package, "Directory Service, Please," and dispatched it.

He put no return address on it, because Verneil would recognize the "Jesse" who had signed the letter. In any case, it did not matter; he was dead before the little package reached New Orleans.

IT CAME into the city on the first day of the annual Mardi Gras, and, being marked for directory service, it was passed along to the proper quarters, where a much-harassed clerk, wishing her day over and her work done—though there were hours yet to pass—received it among other pieces of mail similarly marked. All in good time she came to the package from Cartagena, noticing the stamps first, and thinking of her niece's stamp collection. Being constantly subject to all kinds of script, she had developed some facility in reading the scrawls that passed beneath her eye. But Jesse Brennan's script, while superficially legible, tended toward carelessness, so that his i's were dot-less, and many of his consonants run together, with the result that, shifting her eyes from the stamps to the address she must service, she read it at once: Alan Verneul—and why should she not, when one of Alan Verneul's most spectacular divorce cases had been won that day, and his name was everywhere from the *Globe* to the *Picayune?* And who, but somebody in Colombia, would not know his address? She added it to Brennan's script, and sent the package on its way.

AT THE moment of its arrival, Alan Verneul was at the telephone. Where was the domino he had ordered? He knew it should be in his hands; indeed, it should have awaited him on his return from court, but, though his costume and everything else was in perfect readiness, there was no domino. And none other to be had, admitted his costumer reluctantly. Verneul's first thought, therefore, at the arrival of the package, was that the missing domino had turned up, though it was long since in the hands of a black roisterer, who had found it where it had been lost out of the package from the costumer's.

But sight of the stamps disillusioned him. Nevertheless, he opened it, wondering whom he knew in Cartagena, where he had never been. He looked first at the signature. Perhaps Jesse Melanchton, who had gone to South America somewhere after his day in court. The letter puzzled him. He misread its salutation, which, characteristically, Brennan had written so that it might have been Alan, Alain, or Allen; he had no rea-

son to feel that any error had been made. Still, Melanchton was likely to remember the address of his apartment.

He came at last to the spectacles.

Even he could recognize their age—it needed no explanation, such as was in the letter, for the glass in the spectacles was a strange cloudy blue, a kind of smoky blue the like of which he had never seen before; and their frame was evidently hand-wrought, of silver. He put them down on his dressing-table and read the letter once more. A curious thing, certainly. Whoever Jesse was, he was a superstitious man just as certainly.

He brushed the letter and the wrapping of the package to one side, and was about to lay the spectacles away when a thought struck him. He looked at the spectacles once again. They were large, square; they had but a narrow bridge, and were thickly-framed. Awkward thing to wear, no doubt, but in the circumstances, quite proper. They were not out of character, since Verneul was about to join the maskers in the costume of a New Orleans dandy of more than a century ago, and the blue spectacles would do very well indeed in place of the missing domino.

He carried them to a mirror and put them on. He could not have devised a better concealment for his eyes, for he could see through them very well, but none could see his eyes behind them.

There were reasons why he would not like to be known behind his mask. There were irate husbands and equally irate fathers, some of whom had threatened him with various degrees of dire punishment. Moreover, as a divorce lawyer, he entertained many feminine clients, who, if they were not guilty of adultery when they came to him, were guilty at leaving, Verneul having a facility for exacting fees in coin other than money. His success in court bred envy and contempt; his success with the ladies bred hatred and jealousy. But his boldness knew no end, and his self-assurance never faced retreat.

He got dressed, went outside, and took a cab to where the roistering crowds were gay along the streets. There he left the cab and mixed among them: tall saturnine, handsome still young at forty and attractive. Secure before his roving eyes, he wore the blue spectacles.

HE HAD taken part in the Mardi Gras many times before. It was no novelty to him, and he had not come particularly to enjoy the celebrants or even to watch the parades and the floats; his role was predatory, and his eyes darted hither and yon in search of likely women who might be unable to resist his charms. He walked leisurely about; now that he was in the midst of the celebrants, he had ample time at his disposal, and there was no need to hasten. There were hours yet before he need make his choice among the masked women who danced all around him.

He had not gone far, however, before he reflected that he had never seen the crowds quite so riotous and gay, and, thinking thus, he chanced to look up to see where he was. After a moment of puzzled gazing, here and there, he had to admit to himself that he did not know; somehow, he had wandered into a section of the city completely strange to him, despite certain similarities in old gables and corners. Observing this, he stood quite still and scrutinized his surroundings with his practiced legal eye. During the interval of his examination, he saw surprising things abounding.

There were no street-lamps of any kind.

There was no modern vehicle in sight for as far as he could see, even such floats as were there being horse-drawn.

The hour being close to twilight, many of the roisterers carried crude, homemade torches, while others carried lanterns of a decidedly old-fashioned kind.

He noticed these facts with mounting amazement, but he had no time to speculate on them, for at the moment he felt the tap of a fan on his shoulder, and, turning, found himself looking into the eyes of a strikingly beautiful girl, momentarily raising her mask so that he might see her.

"I've been looking for you," she said, mysteriously.

"Have you?" he answered for lack of anything else to say.

"You're late."

"I came as soon as I could," he answered, determined to play her game.

How beautiful she was. Creole, he

thought—certainly of mixed blood somewhere in her background. With black eyes like something alive and fathomless as a distant sea, soft, velvety skin, long, slender hands. Even in the ruffled and bustled costume she wore it was possible to recognize that her figure was superb. He forgot about the strangeness of the street on which they stood.

"Come," she said, and began to move swiftly away from him, darting in and out among the crowds.

His pulse quickened. "Wait for me," he called after her.

She turned her head briefly, and went on.

He started forward, determined to catch her. The old excitement of the chase filled him, and his only goal now was the pursuit, after which the conquest would surely be his. He did not stop to think who she might be; he had not recognized her face. He knew only that she was beautiful, far more than ordinarily so, that there was something haunting about her eyes and her mouth, that vaguely, deep, deep in his mind, there was a familiar echo, as if somehow, in a far past time, he had known the enchantment of loving a woman like her.

She wove in and out, fleetingly, light and graceful.

But try as he might, somehow he could not catch up to her. She remained always just in sight, and once or twice she paused, mockingly, as if to wait for him; but always she was gone, just as he came within easy speaking distance. He smiled, and his smile held.

In one way or another, in and out of Mardi Gras, he had done this a great many times—and almost always he had emerged the victor. There was no reason why he should not add this vixen to his list of conquests.

He redoubled his efforts.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, the crowd thinned and was gone. They were alone in a side street, just the two of them, with her white dress six or seven doors ahead of him, and her mocking laughter drifting back in the warm air. Night had fallen, and no lights shone, but it did not matter; like a will-o-wisp she remained always just so far ahead of him, lighter and fleeter on her feet than he, and more sure of herself in the darkness, for once or twice he stumbled and almost fell.

He had no idea where he was; he did not care. His one thought was to catch up to the woman ahead of him; to find his way back would be a matter of moments, once the conquest had been accomplished.

QUITE suddenly she paused. She waited until he was almost up to her; then she turned into a dark, bush-girt lawn, running swiftly to a wide verandah, up the steps to a door, and into the house that stood there. She left the door standing ajar, which was a patent invitation.

He followed.

Inside, despite the darkness, he saw her vanishing into a dimly-lit room.

There, too, he followed.

Instantly, it seemed, the room was alight. The door was shut behind him; his quarry was over across the room. Before him and all around, even at his back, between him and the door, there were men—all in costume, the costume of pirates, clearly. But none was masked; and the domino was gone from the face of his quarry, also, as well as the smile.

For a moment the tableau held. Everyone looked at him with grim tenseness, as at an intruder whose intrusion must be punished.

He felt a brief, thin pricking of fear, but, of course, it was Mardi Gras, and people would understand. Or would they? There was something ominous in the tense quiet of the room.

He looked quickly around, his eyes searching for a familiar face. He saw none.

The tableau broke.

The circle closed around him, save for one arc directly before him, in the center of which sat a roughly dandified man wearing a smart black beard and mustache. He was toying with a short-barrelled pistol of some ancient manufacture. He gazed at Verneul with a mixture of indifference and contempt, which did not conceal his grimness.

"M. Verneul," he said, rather than asked.

"I am known," said Verneul, with a faint smile.

"Speak when you are spoken to," said his host curtly.

Verneul bridled. "Look here. I admit

to entering the house, at the indirect invitation of the young lady, but. . . ."

"M. Verneul has entered houses after young ladies before this, I think," drawled the seated gentleman. "And forced his attentions with and without permission upon a good many of those young ladies." He nodded toward someone standing at his side. "Will you read the charges, Mr. Ariman?"

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?" asked Verneul peremptorily.

There was a ripple of laughter. The seated gentleman rose and made a mocking bow. "Pray forgive me, sir," he said with an edge of unmistakable contempt in his voice. "I am Jean Lafitte, at your service."

His acting, thought Verneul, was startlingly real. "I am sure you will excuse me, gentlemen," he said. "But it is Mardi Gras and. . . ."

"Hold your tongue," said Lafitte, and waved a hand to Ariman. "Read."

"On the sixth of February of last year, he accomplished the seduction of Claire Pechon, sixteen, against her will," read Ariman in a clear voice. "On the second of March, Mlle. Julie Argenton, with child by him, took her own life by drowning. On the eighteenth of April, he seduced Mme. Therese Munon, wife of Leon, who, discovering himself a cuckold, shot his wife and then himself. On the tenth of May, he deflowered Janise Bourgereau, seventeen."

VERNEUL wanted to shout his denial of the ridiculous account, but there was something puzzling, something shockingly confusing inside him. For, though he knew none of the women whose names were being read out with such solemnity, it was undeniable that as each name was read, there rose from some unknown depth of memory the picture of a woman's face, successively—of a sixteen year old girl, and one slightly older, of a married woman, of another girl—pictures which, in some remote corner of his mind, were recognizable. Words struggled to his lips, but they were not of denial.

"The prosecutor has forgotten the year of his charge," he said, as if by rote.

"Since this is 1811, the year must be 1810," said Lafitte. "You are more particular in this than ever you were about your victims, M. Verneul."

The confusion inside him increased to chaos. Was there two of him, then, that he could remember things which he knew had never taken place? And what was this of 1810 and 1811 now in this twentieth century?

"M. Verneul does not seem to understand that he is standing trial," said Lafitte.

"Trial?" echoed Verneul. "Gentlemen, I am in a fog. . . ."

"Indeed, indeed," murmured Lafitte. "A good ladies' man was never a good swordsman, and quicker to know fear than most men. You shall have justice, do not be alarmed. What have you to say in your defense?"

No words came. There were words deep inside him somewhere, but they could not find an outlet.

"Come, say—is it true that you have seduced young girls?"

He could not answer.

Lafitte turned to Ariman. "Put down that the prisoner has admitted it." And to Verneul once more. "And that you have persuaded silly married women to adultery?"

No answer.

"Once more, he assents. And now, M. Verneul, is it not true also that on the seventh day of this very month you attacked and ravaged Elise Gautier, my ward?" Lafitte flung his arm out to indicate the woman who, but so short a time gone by, had been his eagerly-desired quarry.

He wanted to say that he had never seen her before in his life; but he could not be sure. It seemed to him that memory of her lingered, but from what source? He could not say; he did not know. How had he come here? The woman, yes—but how had it happened? Part of him recalled the unlit streets and thought them natural; but part thought them wrong, knew them wrong. What was happening to him? What fantastic conspiracy was this?

Lafitte had stood up. "M. Paul Verneul, will you hear your sentence?"

He wanted to say, "My name is Alan, Alan Paul," but nothing came from his lips; and indeed, at the moment he could not be sure that anything at all came from any tongue or throat; for he had cast down his

eyes, and seen not floor, but long grass, and an edge of stone, as of a stone box of some kind.

". . . To be shot," Lafitte was saying. "Now."

Instantly half a dozen of the old-fashioned pistols were leveled at him, cocked and ready.

"Aim," said Lafitte to the widening circle.

VERNEUL stood as if paralyzed. If only he could know! Which was the dream—this or that other? Which was the reality—that distant world in which he was a counselor, or this world of the dandy of New Orleans in 1811? Which, indeed!

"Fire!" said Lafitte.

There was a round of blasts. Briefly, the world of Alan Verneul was a turbulence of strange, smoky blue.

They found him in a long-abandoned cemetery in the outlying country south of New Orleans, though still within the city limits. Dead. By what means, none could say. There were some half a dozen bluish marks on his flesh, as if bullets had gone into him; but no skin was broken. In the course of the inquiry, it was discovered that Verneul had been seen rushing madly through the Mardi Gras crowds in pursuit of someone no one had been able to see; that he had been observed by a passer-by in the cemetery, standing quite alone, talking and gesticulating so that his observer thought him drunk and went on; that the cemetery stood on the site of an old house once the property of Désiré Gautier; that the house, according to legend, was the scene of the fatal shooting of an ancestor of Verneul's more than a century ago.

When he was found, Verneul still wore the blue spectacles.

Since Alain Verneil was curator of the city museum, he saw and recognized their value. And in good time, he got around to adding them to his collection, thus accomplishing Jesse Brennan's original intention.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# Two Face

**BY FRANK BELKNAP LONG**

THE ship came sweeping down into the valley like a great silver gull, its vanes catching the sunlight and throwing a wheeling shadow on the green world below.

The men crowding the view room were like children set free in the warm October, after a month of school, given leave to shout and cheer, with bells ringing like mad and the whole town in a holiday mood.

This is your day, kiddies. Make the most of it. Go home and get into fancy costumes,

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*When venturers conquer the last frontier of star-studded space, what facts and impossibilities shall they find?*

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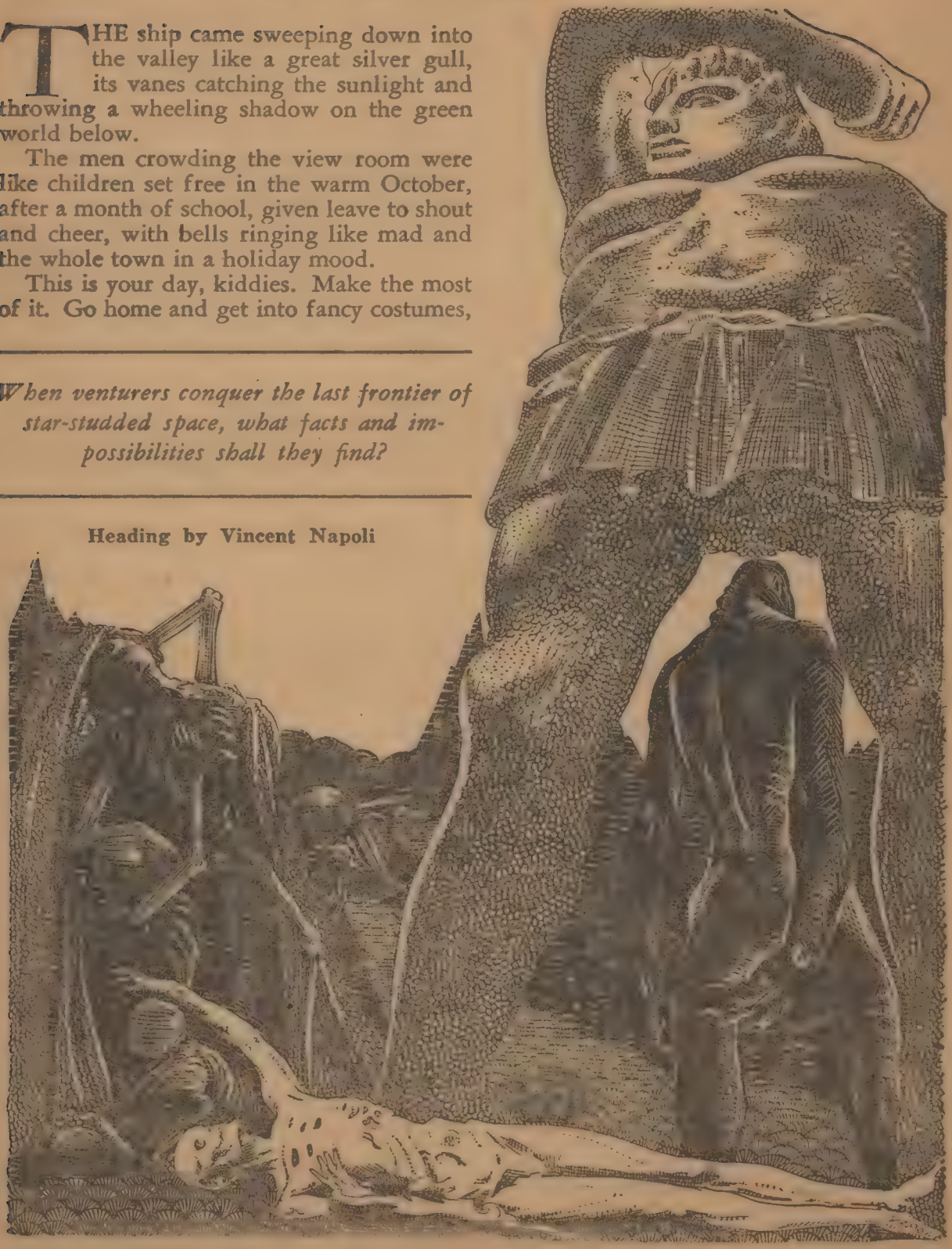
**Heading by Vincent Napoli**



break open packages of colored chalk, cut eye-holes in pumpkins, race up and down stairs dressed up for Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Christmas.

The men crowding the view room felt sweat break out on their necks and hands. They were not altogether convinced that the green world was real.

How could a man ever be sure that the great day was real? The torturing anticipation, the high-soaring hopes and fears, the travail, the weariness, the discipline of long days and nights in star-dusty space could give birth to strange doubts which even the shimmer of sunlight on a green valley could not dispel.

How could one be sure when the sun was not Sol, but Alpha of the Centaurs, and the green world was not Mars or Venus, but the warmest of little inner planets swimming in a dreamed of tomorrow that had suddenly become today.

Today, now, this instant, as the great ship circled and wheeled, its shadow lengthening on the walls of the green ravine.

"Steady as she goes!" Captain Paul Hendry called out, his shoulders held straight in the port gleam, a dawning wonder in his stare.

Equally eager and straight stood John Hoskins, meteorologist, a little man with keen hawk eyes, and Fred Allison, a man of strength and girth and a Gargantuan appetite for the good things of life. Jim Miles, still pale from his museum chores on Earth, had lost a leg in World War IV, and it was a little difficult for him to stand as straight as the others. But his eyes were as eager, his lips as tight.

Each of the dozen men stood straight in his own way, some with a straightness of the spirit, and others with a straightness of the body, and a few with a straightness that was simply a relief from anxiety, from the fact of fear.

As the men watched the valley sweep up, widening and deepening, a bulkhead panel swung open, and a slim girl came into the view room. She had tawny hair and clear blue eyes.

The men turned and by a curious quirk of identification their minds placed the valley glow about the head of the girl, and by a curious quirk of sympathy they transferred their own emotions to the lucky fellow who stepped forward to take her in his arms.

It was inevitable that Allison should be the lucky one, for Barbara Maitland, archaeologist, she of the shining skills and tight-braided hair, preferred strength and confidence to caution in a man.

"It's good to know this belongs to everybody!" the girl breathed. "We've crossed space to another star and we've proved that it could be done, and now it belongs to every man, woman and child on Earth. We mustn't ever allow ourselves to forget that!"

"Not a chance!" Allison laughed, holding her in a tight, waltzing embrace. "We'll go on from here! This is just a beginning!"

Around and around they waltzed, while the men grinned, cheered, shouted, wept. Captain Hendry brought his fist down on his palm with a resounding smack and said: "Break it up, lads! Save the fireworks until we've set her down!"

THE ship came to rest on a sloping green hillside, with hardly a tremor, and Captain Hendry busied himself with the duties peculiar to his command and the experts went to work and long-nourished fears, doubts and trepidations vanished like tallow in bright sunlight as the good news spread through the ship.

Everyone seemed to be talking at once.

"The air is just right, sir! A little high in oxygen content, but we can take the excess in our stride, sir!"

"The temperature is just dandy, sir. Couldn't be better. Sixty-five in the shade!"

"We won't need spacesuits, sir! We can go outside whenever you give the word!"

Just give the wonderful, bright, shining word and we'll all go outside and scoop up handfuls of the new earth, and breathe the new air deep into our lungs and flash the great news back to Earth on a radio with a range of light years. Just give the word, sir!

Captain Hendry gestured for silence and called for three volunteers. The first man to step forward was Fred Allison, with a quick intake of his breath. Jim Miles wet his lips

and reached Allison's side in two limping strides, a little ahead of Hoskins, who moved with the deliberation of a scientist refusing to be rushed.

"Now then, men!" Captain Hendry said, his eyes flashing. "We'll just go down into the valley and have a look around. I've a great deal of respect for the captain who marched all of his men down a hill and marched them straight back again. He had a fine flair for the dramatic. He should also have been handed over to a lunacy commission!"

"We'd all like to go outside, sir!" a foolish lad protested. "We really would, sir!"

"You'll get your chance!" Hendry laughed. "We'll be here a long time."

Without further ado Captain Hendry swung about and walked toward the gravity lock. Allison, Miles and Hoskins fell into step at his heels, feeling suddenly organized and confident, ready to follow the captain to the ends of the earth. For surely this was an earth, even if it were not Terra. Just as warm and friendly, just as green, just as ripe for exploration.

The air was cool and sweet, good to breathe, and as the gravity lock closed with a gentle murmur the four men stood for an instant directly in front of the ship, stood utterly motionless with a shivering wonder in their thoughts, drinking in the fresh new vista. Then they swung about and went striding down into the valley, walking four abreast, compact little energy weapons jogging on their hips.

On such a mission Captain Hendry had no desire to take the lead. Share and share alike, in danger and glory, and let each man be a captain in his own right.

EXPLORING a new world was like pouring a generous measure of champagne into a glass and watching the bubbles collect in frosty beads. You had to be a little careful about drinking the champagne. Like as not it would be bad for you. The pouring was the thing, savoring the aroma of a new world, watching the bubbles sparkle and dance.

Green grass under their feet, a caressing wind on their cheeks and the valley sloping away to a misty glimmering. The valley widening out and each of the four thinking: This is it! This is the great day and we are the first! This is our moment to bequeath to our children's children, this is our fine, bright, new gift to the world of tomorrow!

They were a thousand feet below the ship when the thin mist rolled back and the glimmering heart of the valley swept into their view.

Captain Hendry stopped walking, the beauty and wonder crashing about him like a shattering house of glass. Miles cried out hoarsely, and let fear and revulsion sweep him, making no effort to conceal the way he felt.

"Look! Oh, look!" Hoskins muttered, pointing, a spasm twisting the muscles of his throat.

Only Allison took the sight in his stride. Only Allison stood up to it, throwing out his arms in a gesture of defiance and fierce human pride, throwing his arms out and back as if to embrace that incredible challenge to humanity and hold it in a crushing hammerlock.

In the still green depths of the valley a great stone figure loomed. Titanic in girth, aureoled in radiance, it straddled the valley with a terrible, possessive strength.

The colossus was a brutish parody of the human figure as evolution had shaped that figure on Earth. It was apelike and yet not quite an ape, manlike but in no sense a true man. The barrel chest, the long, dangling arms, and the bared teeth were wholly simian. But the cranial bulge above the massive eye sockets was more pronounced than the brain bulge of Homo sapiens, and the long, apelike arms terminated in slender-fingered hands, white and almost feminine in their delicacy.

The stone giant was staring straight up the valley slope, its brutish arms outspread, its malign, heavy-jowled face flashing glints of sunlight into the eyes of the staring men from Earth. Briefly and fantastically the sunlight flitted over the bulging eyeballs of the brute, etching blue shadows into the sunken cheeks, filling the mouth with fire.

The colossus was still with the stillness of a carven gargoyle crouching on some

cathedral fastness in an age of blood and strife.

"If that statue is an idol it would debase the most primitive cult of cannibals on Earth!" Hoskins choked.

"Yes, you are right, Hoskins!" Captain Hendry agreed. "It sickens me just to look at it. We'd better go back!"

"Go back!" Allison stood against the glare, facing the valley slope. "You can't be serious, sir! It took genius to carve a figure like that out of solid rock! It's the greatest of all great stone faces! More than a face, a complete humanoid shape! This planet is inhabited by craftsmen, by heaven!"

"Craftsmen?" Hendry muttered. "Craftsmen, did you say? You mean barbarians with a terrible, naked hatred of life! A love of cruelty and death. Just look at that face. Let its expression sink into you, man! If you give it half a chance—it will remold your brain to fit the way it feels about you!"

Allison threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"It seems to amuse you, Allison!" Hendry said.

ALLISON turned with a defiant shrug. "If that's the kind of idol they prefer to worship—it's their funeral, not ours! We carry powerful weapons. We can take care of ourselves. Let's not be childish about this."

Captain Hendry turned and put his hand on Miles' shoulder. "What do you think, Jim? Shall we go back?"

Miles shut his eyes before replying. In his mind's gaze he saw Barbara Maitland standing by the view port, framed against the stellar night, her hair a tawny web of glory.

He remembered how she talked, laughed, sat, walked. In his thoughts he reached out and took her into his arms. In his thoughts she broke away from him, mocking him with her healthy straight young body. How could she love a man who limped, who seldom smiled, who was wedded by temperament to cold precision instruments and the dry dust of museums?

What did it matter that they had been childhood sweethearts, when choking dry dust now rose like a cloud between them.

A reckless young cub, Allison. Untamed and callow, a lion cub in his cruel playfulness. As ready to slap a woman as to love her, trading on his bronzed, first-youth boyishness, his winning smile. What incredible fools women were to be taken in by rippling muscles and the thinly disguised ugliness of an outsized human brute masquerading as a laughing Apollo.

Just how much happiness would Barbara lose if the lion cub went down alone into the valley and never came back? Not much, surely.

No woman could be happy for long in a lion cub's playful embrace.

"Well, Jim, what do you say?" Captain Hendry urged.

Jim turned with a shudder of self-loathing. "Allison has made up his mind, sir," he said. "We can't let him go alone."

"I can order him back!" Hendry protested. "What do you think this is, a debating society?"

"No, sir. But if you order Allison back he'll refuse to obey. You'll have to discipline him."

"Say what you mean, man!" Hendry flared. "You mean I'll have to blast him down."

"That's correct, sir."

Hendry reddened. "Are you suggesting that I allow him to flaunt discipline?"

Miles shook his head. "No, sir. If you order him back and he refuses everlasting regret will walk with us. Why give him a chance to flaunt discipline, sir? You can untie your hands by killing him. But wouldn't it be simpler to go along with him? How about it?"

Deeper in the valley the Captain fell to arguing again. "I was crazy to listen to you, Jim," he said.

Miles frowned, jogging on. The colossus loomed above them and the valley sloped away and the hot sunlight beat down. Allison had fallen back, to join the others. Another minute and Captain Hendry would have forgotten his anger, would have accepted him again as a comrade in arms. But that minute never came.

THERE was no time for further talk, a shifting of perspective, the satisfying realization that discipline on a new world was less important than Captain Hendry had dreamed.

For the valley was suddenly swarming with living men and women, tawny-skinned and lithe of limb, wearing primitive garments of some rough cloth and carrying themselves with the natural, easy grace of barbarians everywhere.

They came swarming up the slope, shouting and laughing, straight toward the four men from Earth. A sing-song kind of speech they had. It certainly wasn't Chinese, but it was good to hear, warm and rich and vibrant.

"Don't let them come too close!" Hendry warned, his hand darting to his hip.

It was a needless warning. For when the laughing barbarians came close fear went away. Uneasiness and suspicion went away.

Allison burst out laughing. "They're like children!" he said, laughing very hard. "Friendly children."

"Yes!" Hoskins agreed.

Miles said nothing. He simply stood still and accepted the warm tribute of friendliness in stunned disbelief. An incredible outflowing of pure good will it was, a thing that could be instantly sensed. The men came up and patted the four men from Earth on the shoulder. With gratitude in their eyes, with appreciation and respect and loyalty and hometown pride, as though they were greeting football heroes at the end of a great game.

A truly great game! It was a heartier greeting than any handshake, a thing of wild enthusiasm. It was like being lifted on the shoulders of a cheering crowd.

The women were more circumspect. They simply knelt and embraced the feet of the men from Earth.

The friendly people. Ah, how friendly they were, how incredibly kind. Kneeling at Allison's feet a sloe-eyed woman crooned to him in tender rapture as Captain Hendry paced slowly back and forth. Had an hour passed or an eternity?

Of course, it wasn't real. Of course they were all dreaming, and this couldn't be real. In a moment it would crash and dissolve, splinter and whip away, like a great ship ripped asunder by a collision in space, floundering in the black gulfs and throwing out pinwheeling splashes of light as it shattered into dust.

The four men from Earth were in a lush green valley with a high windy cave behind them. They were being slowly suffocated with friendliness. It was impossible for them to break away.

Miles felt a vague uneasiness as Hendry paced, a desire to talk to Hendry. He stood up and walked slowly to the captain's side, and joined him in his pacing.

"This is incredible!" he said.

"Quite!" Hendry agreed.

"We ought to be getting back to the ship, sir!"

"All in good time!" Hendry said.

"You're not resigned to staying here, sir?"

"What do you take me for?" Hendry stopped pacing to glare at Miles. "We'll be getting back soon enough."

"But blast it, sir, why don't we go immediately?"

"Because I don't want to antagonize these people!" Hendry blurted out. "We've got to live with them. Another planet of another star—inhabited by a really friendly race of human beings. Do you realize what that means, Jim?"

"It has been making my head spin!" Miles acknowledged. "They're not at all like us, sir."

"I know, Jim."

"There's no suspicion, no malice in them. Where are all the instinctive tribal antagonisms you'd expect to find in a barbarian culture? We're strangers here, outsiders. But that doesn't mean a thing to them!"

"I know, I know!" Hendry muttered, looking concerned. "There's something horribly wrong here, but I can't put my finger on it."

"Wrong? You don't like it? Look here, sir. This friendliness is the real thing. It's genuine, deep-seated. Don't ask me how I know but I do know, sir. I can feel it in my bones!"

"So can I!" Hendry conceded. "And I

still don't like it. It's not natural, it's not—well, human."

HENDRY raised his eyes and stared at Allison. The big man sat on a boulder, with a barbarian maid on each of his sun-bronzed knees. Another girl crouched at his feet, staring up at him with the rapt absorption of an Indian basket maker. Ensnaring him in a warm and friendly way, but not at all possessively.

"They're just naturally free of guile, sir!" Miles commented. "Simple and generous and kind. They don't even hate one another!"

"I'm not blind," Hendry grunted. "Sex antagonism is pretty basic with us. Just about rock bottom basic. Those girls aren't even jealous."

Hendry turned as he spoke, and contemplated Hoskins. Hoskins was doing an incredible thing. He was engaging in athletic competition. The friendly people were disc throwers.

Before the cave three tall native strong boys were hurling flat wooden discs at a distant stage. The discs were perforated, and the game was quite obviously a far Centaurian variant of an old rustic game which still survived on Earth.

The first disc thrower missed the stake by a good two yards. As he grimaced and groaned another strong boy came closer. The skillfully hurled disc of number three grazed the stake with a vibrant twang. Hoskins made a ringer!

It was an incredible feat, for the punched-out center of the disc barely fitted the stake. The three strong boys surrounded Hoskins and lifted him to their shoulders. They pranced around with him in a wild fury of acclaim.

"We can be good losers, too!" Miles breathed quickly.

One of the barbarian girls came up to Hoskins and locked her arms about his neck.

The three strong boys drew away and grinned at Hoskins. Hoskins flushed guiltily and straightened a little, as if anticipating trouble. But the strong boys continued to grin. Their expressions said as plain as words: "You're a better man than we are, Gunga Din! That young lady is just about the cutest trick on this planet. But you've won her honestly, in fair competition. Compared to you we just don't rate!"

It was amusing, in a way, because Hoskins wasn't the hairy-chested type. He just happened to be good at disc throwing.

"Well, now!" Captain Hendry said.

"We can be good losers, too, sir!" Miles reiterated, wtih vehemence, as if eager to convince himself.

"Oh, sure, sure we can!" Hendry agreed. "Only—suppose an athlete from another country beat us to the punch. Beat us at something we're really good at. We might applaud him a little with a wry face, being careful to conceal our resentment. Part of that applause would be honest, too. We're not incapable of generous impulses.

"But suppose the blondes and the redheads went all out for that big, brave hero from another land. Would we retire from the arena with good grace, with pleasure and delight?"

"Of course not, sir, but—"

"He'd be lucky if he escaped with his life. Wars start that way, son, and don't you forget it!"

"But the friendliness of these people embraces everything!" Miles protested. "They're just naturally friendly, brimming over with good will!"

"I know," Hendry said, scowling. "It won't hurt us to think about Freud for a minute or two. We may have the answer there!"

"Freud, sir?"

"You know the old theory. It has never been disproved."

Hendry stared up at the colossus as he spoke, a look of fear-tinged exasperation in his stare.

"Look at it this way, son. The subconscious is a mysterious thing, brimming over with all that's hateful in man. You've got to have some outlet for that jungle part of yourself, or you'll be pure brute, a beast with the intelligence of a man.

"If you try to keep it locked up in your mind, deny its existence, you won't behave like a man. Certainly not like these people. But suppose you let that jungle heritage

flow out in a vicarious, harmless way. Suppose you think about it, and accept it? Suppose you talk about it for all the world to hear?"

"Talk about it, sir?"

"Exactly. Suppose you make a work of art that's the embodiment of primal hate, fear, rage, pure animal cunning and treachery, everything a truly civilized man despises in himself."

Hendry threw out his arms in a half gesture toward the colossus straddling the valley glow. "Look up there, son! That's it! There you see the subconscious brute in these people given substance, personified, made objective for all the world to see! And now these people are free. By making an open confession of their guilt they've purged themselves and attained real nobility."

Miles started. "By heaven, sir, I believe you've got something there!"

"Wait a minute, son. Let me finish. You can make a false confession too. The ancient Romans did that. They pretended the jungle heritage didn't exist. They worshipped a false nobility. The Magna Mater. A great stone image of a serene and beautiful woman, the soul of nobility, incapable of treachery or malice. And the Romans were quite the most bloodthirsty people in history."

"But, sir, you can't be serious!" Miles said, aghast. "That's not what we've been taught to believe. Brutal people *have* fashioned cruel primitive brutal idols!"

"That's true, son! But they still failed to make an honest confession. Take the Nazi hordes—or the hordes of Genghis Khan. They were twice as hypocritical as the Romans. They worshipped a brutal, *veiled* idol. The veil of mystical mumbo-jumbo distorted the brutality, so they could still pretend it didn't exist for them."

Miles looked up at the colossus and saw that it wore no veil. Its naked ugliness was unique.

MILES looked again at the friendly people. There was a sweet-souled gentleness in the eyes of the girl who knelt at Allison's feet. Miles realized suddenly that the girl would have liked Allison all for herself. Surely that was natural, human enough. But she was willing to relinquish Allison if holding on to him meant hating. Hate she could not abide.

She had made a confession, an honest confession, along with all of her people. Now she found it desirable to be grown up.

What a pity that Allison was such a scoundrelly brute. Incapable of loyalty to any one woman—

Wait, hold on. Such thoughts were jungle-spawned.

Miles looked at Hendry and said, "Sir, I've a confession to make. It confirms your theory, in a way!"

"Well, son?"

"Coming down here I experienced an upsurge of primal hate, sir, directed against Allison. I wanted to see him dead. I'm pretty sure you know why."

"I can guess, son," Hendry said.

"I let myself go, subconsciously. I didn't try to hide it from myself. I didn't try to tell myself that I was just being noble and protective. Oh, I did at first. But then I really let myself go. I saw red. My hands were pressed against Allison's windpipe and I was throttling him. Do you understand, sir? I was all brute, for a minute."

"Ah, yes—yes, son," Hendry sighed. "Our neolithic ancestors were all brutes for a good many minutes."

"It ceased to be just a subconscious thing, sir. It flowed up from the dark depths of my mind into imaged clearness. It became like that colossus, a conscious work of art, all evil, an honest confession which I made to myself!"

"And then you were free of it? It left you?"

"A good deal of it left me. I was a better man for it. Maybe if I had a lump of soft clay right now and could push it around and make it look like Allison—"

"That's what honest art is for, son. To tell us as much as we can endure to know about ourselves. Otherwise, we just go on being primitive and—two-faced, son!"

Two-faced!

Hendry raised his thin, bony hands in the sunlight and looked at them. Fiercely he told himself that he was not an old man.

There was one test of youth—and only one. You couldn't tell how old a man was by pressing a stethoscope to his chest and testing his blood pressure. You had to look deep into his eyes. You had to ask him about—his memories.

The memories of an old man were like withered leaves falling on a stagnant pool at midnight. Not fresh and green and alive. And the scars of an old man were quite different from the scars of youth. An old man could not point to his scars as Hendry could and say: "There's room on my body for a hundred more. Even in pain and blindness I would not shrink from shining adventure!"

When a man remembered that way, when a man was proud of his scars, seventy-two years could not rob him of his right to feel young.

Hendry looked at the young girl in Allison's arms and a convulsive spasm twisted the muscles of his face. He did not begrudge Allison his day in the sun. No—he was two-faced in a different way.

Within him fierce tides of youth hammered and battered against the citadel of calm, mature wisdom he had become in the eyes of the world. No one suspected what a young colt he was still, how devil-may-care his thoughts could be. He had to keep all that under lock and key.

Miles suddenly realized that he was being stared at. One of the barbarian women was standing just outside the cave, looking carefully at him out of wide, dark, wondering eyes.

For a moment Miles did not breathe. He was acutely conscious of his limp, his intolerable scholar's shyness, his mental scars. If he walked toward her, limping, would she draw back? Turn and flee perhaps, into the cave?

For the first time he became fully aware of the true grace of these people, their childlike charm. Their features were strong and mobile, their complexions clear and they moved with the quick, free-limbed ease of forest creatures on Earth.

The women were as alert as gazeless, as easily startled, as quick to turn their large, limpid eyes upon a man and search for hidden, friendly meanings in the face he kept turned to the world.

Miles told himself that a deer hunter with a gun under his arm, emerging from a thicket, looking stern and harsh, would be totally disarmed by such eyes.

And why should he not respond to the shining tenderness and complete trust in the eyes of a woman who was in all respects the exact opposite of a hunted creature? Was she not edging toward him even now, a challenging eagerness in her stare?

Almost before Miles realized that he had moved the barbarian girl was in his arms. He kissed her, gently at first, because kissing was new to her and must have seemed very strange.

After a moment only Miles found it strange. Strange that he should be holding one woman in his arms and thinking of another, strange that warm lips could seem cold, the hair that fell across his shoulders remote, unreal. Strange that the barbarian girl was in no sense precious to him.

DISENTANGLING the girl's arms, Miles looked quickly away. If only he could speak to her in her own language, could tell her how sorry he was that he could not love her as she deserved to be loved.

A bitter despair took hold of Miles. He suddenly found that he couldn't endure the friendly people any longer. Just looking at them was pure torment.

He turned and walked into the cave, not caring whether he was followed or not. It was a quite ordinary cave, but as he moved through the gloom a curious relief crept upon him. Tension diminished, fell away.

With slow, confident steps he walked on. The cave was cool, spacious. Fresh, scented winds blew through it, carrying the fragrance of valley meadows, the peace of noonday glades. Clean earth smells were in his nostrils, the good magic of the earth, uncorked here on an alien world by the hypnotic tug of his thoughts.

He forgot the passage of time, his duty, the need of remaining in contact with his companions. A passage from a half-forgotten poem flashed through his mind. *And I*

*shall have some peace here, for peace comes dripping slow, dripping from out the vales of the morning to where the cricket sings . . .*

As he walked on a glimmer of light came swimming toward him and grew brighter. The cave walls seemed to waver and recede and he suddenly found himself standing in the open again, staring up at a collossal stone figure.

THE figure was valley-spanning, lithe-limbed and athletic in aspect. It seemed to grow out of another figure which faced away from it—a misshapen, brutish figure. It seemed to be the Siamese twin of a pair of figures, one facing out into the valley, the other toward the cave mouth.

Above the towering stone body of the nearest figure was the carven face of a youth of great nobility, as serene and passionless as the stellar night.

For an instant Miles did not realize that he had emerged from the cave behind the brutish colossus, and was staring up at what should have been its back.

Then, slowly, his vision adjusted itself to the valley glare, and the significance of what he saw etched itself on his mind with the searing bite of an acid wash.

From the mouth of the cave to the base of the colusses the valley slope was strewn with human skeletons. Skeletons alone and in groups, huddled together as though for warmth, impaled in solitary agony on spits of garish sunlight, bent double, in fleeing attitudes, in attitudes seeming to denote uneasy repose.

Skeletons with their knees drawn up, their arms twisted inward. Skeletons flung headlong as if by some impossible-to-imagine violence, their bony fingers clawing at the earth. Skeletons standing upright, as still as the colossus itself, with long, glittering spears projecting from their backs.

There were at least a hundred skeletons between the cave and the towering stone youth. A hundred hideously impaled skeletons between the dark, earth-scented cave, and that stone-carven symbol of calm nobility and athletic grace.

The words seemed to form deep in the time-shadowed depths of Miles' mind—little whirling echoes of sound at first. Echoes taking form slowly, revolving and twisting in a fearful way, like maggots boring up to the sunlight through the deep subconscious murk.

Two-faced! The friendly people are—two-faced!

Abruptly the words crackled like thunder, bursting unbidden from Miles' shaking lips.

"Two-faced—two-faced—two-faced!"

Unaware that he had turned, Miles suddenly found himself running straight back through the cave, careening like a man with a fearful load on his shoulders, his breath coming in choking gasps.

Captain Hendry was still sitting on the rock when Miles emerged. A weary-eyed old man on a firmly-anchored gray rock, immune to alien pitfalls, resigned now to letting the friendliness seek out a younger target. Allison was still basking in the friendliness and Hoskins was hurling discs again. He seemed to like the game.

Miles could see the shadows of his companions on the stones, moving back and forth or hovering immobile while time itself seemed to stand still.

He walked straight up to Hendry, stooped and whispered hoarsely: "Something terrible has happened. I've made a discovery that changes everything we've believed about these people! Everything, do you understand?"

"Well?" Hendry said, with a hint of weariness. "What is it, Jim?"

Miles told him.

Hendry blanched; then leapt up with a startled cry. "I might have known!" he groaned. "Parallel evolution, up to a point. Then a divergence so wide it strikes at the very core of life."

Miles nodded. "The divergence is mental. Their minds must metamorphose at intervals."

"With the sun, perhaps!" Hendry muttered, his eyes glittering. "A cyclic change. They may be noble by day, evil by night. That's just a guess, of course. The change may come once a month, or once a year."

"Or hourly!" Miles said.

"Yes, yes. Hourly. When they're friendly they make an honest confession, to purge

themselves of evil. They keep before their eyes the image of a brute. When they're cruel and evil they make a lying confession. They worship a noble youth!"

"We've got to get back to the ship, sir!" Miles said.

"Yes!" agreed Hendry. "I'll tell Allison."

Captain Hendry turned, walked to the cave and talked for a full minute to Allison. The shadows seemed to deepen as Miles watched. There was an illusion of twilight.

For a moment Allison sat very still, frowning. Then, suddenly, he was laughing. The light grew dim and red as he gestured out into the valley.

Miles felt a cold horror constricting his chest. Was Allison quite mad?

When Captain Hendry returned to Miles' side his lips were tight. "He doesn't believe you, Jim," he said. "He refuses to budge!"

"Tell him to walk through the cave and look up!" Miles said, passionately.

"It's no use, Jim!" Hendry affirmed, with grim finality. "He doesn't want to believe."

"Then we'll have to leave without him, sir. The safety of the ship comes first."

Hendry shot a quick, searching glance at Miles.

Miles nodded grimly. "I don't hate him now, sir. When I saw those skeletons all that was purged away."

Hendry raised his eyes and stared at the cave for an instant in silence. His shoulders jerked. "Very well, son," he declared finally. "I'm glad you have the courage to face facts bluntly, even if it does seem to put you in a bad light."

"The hell what kind of a light it puts me in, sir. We've got to clear out."

"Right!" Hendry's face showed genuine relief. "I'll tell Hoskins."

Ten minutes later the three men from Earth were high on the valley slope, walking back to the ship with the valley mist deepening about them.

Suddenly Hendry stopped. He laid his hand on Miles' sleeve, his lips white. "Listen!" he said.

It was a human cry that tore out of the stillness, long-drawn, agonized. Yet in some ways it resembled more the cry of a wild beast with its leg caught in a trap.

THE cry was followed by a silence. Then a pattering began deep in the valley and grew swiftly louder. It was not a difficult sound to identify. It was unmistakably the sound of running feet, of many feet running. Treading softly, lightly, but ascending the slope toward the three men from Earth.

Captain Hendry tried to turn. But something seemed to twist him about and hold him rooted, his body as rigid as a metal spike driven deep into the ground.

Hoskins fell back, shading his eyes against the valley glare, his face as grim as death. Miles simply turned quickly, his hand darting to the compact little energy weapon at his hip.

The first of the pursuing barbarians came into view suddenly, a straight, tawny-skinned figure running with his head thrown back.

For an instant brief as a dropped heartbeat Miles opened his mind wide to all the impressions of sense. He saw the long, shining spear, quivering and deadly, the running man's straining throat muscles, the wind-stirred foliage behind him.

A rippling sea shelving to shark-infested shoals, horrible, deadly. Structurally the barbarian's face wasn't apelike. But savage cruelty and cold, bestial rage could do strange things to the lineaments of a human face. The eyes of the running man were slitted on a glaze of hate, and death flashed in the raised spear and danced in the valley shadows. Hate and death—hate and death—

Miles blasted as he would have blasted at a cobra swirling toward him with distended hood, quickly, and without emotion, his gaze riveted on the barbarian's chest.

There was a deafening blast, followed by an incandescent burst of light. For an instant the glare coalesced, hovering like a wind-buffeted fireball in the still air a yard from Miles' arm.

Then long, darting filaments of flame swept from it. They pierced the running man, lifted him up, and hurled him backwards down the slope. He screamed once—and was silent.

After a moment Miles became aware that Hendry was blasting too. Through the

flames which danced on the slope a dozen running forms emerged, only to be hurled backwards down the slope. Just before the firing ceased Hoskins joined in, with a terrible, despairing cry.

There was no need for despair, however, for when the last barbarian fell silence returned to the valley. A silence broken only by the faint rustling of leaves in motion, and the harsh breathing of the men from Earth.

Miles was the first to speak. "We've got to go back," he said. "Weaker men than Allison have survived a spear thrust!"

"You're right, lad!" Hendry said, a set look on his face. "We can't leave him here to die so far from Earth. And if he *is* dead —we've got to see he gets a decent, dignified burial!"

"For all his criminal stubbornness, lad!" Hendry added, nodding.

As darkness deepened in the now almost shapeless sky the men from Earth turned back.

They found Allison lying in shadows close to the cave, stirring a little, a dark stain on his shoulder.

Together they lifted him up.

The men from Earth returned to the ship stumbling a little under their burden, remembering the friendliness, wishing they could have the friendliness back again, but knowing full well that self-preservation was the first law of life.

The ship swept up from the valley like a great, silver gull, its vanes catching the sunlight and throwing a wheeling shadow on the green world below.

The door of Miles' cabin opened and footsteps sounded on the deck.

Miles sat listening to the footsteps draw close. He pressed a blotter to a paper wet with ink, watched black lines seep through, wondered if he had succeeded in smudging his official report.

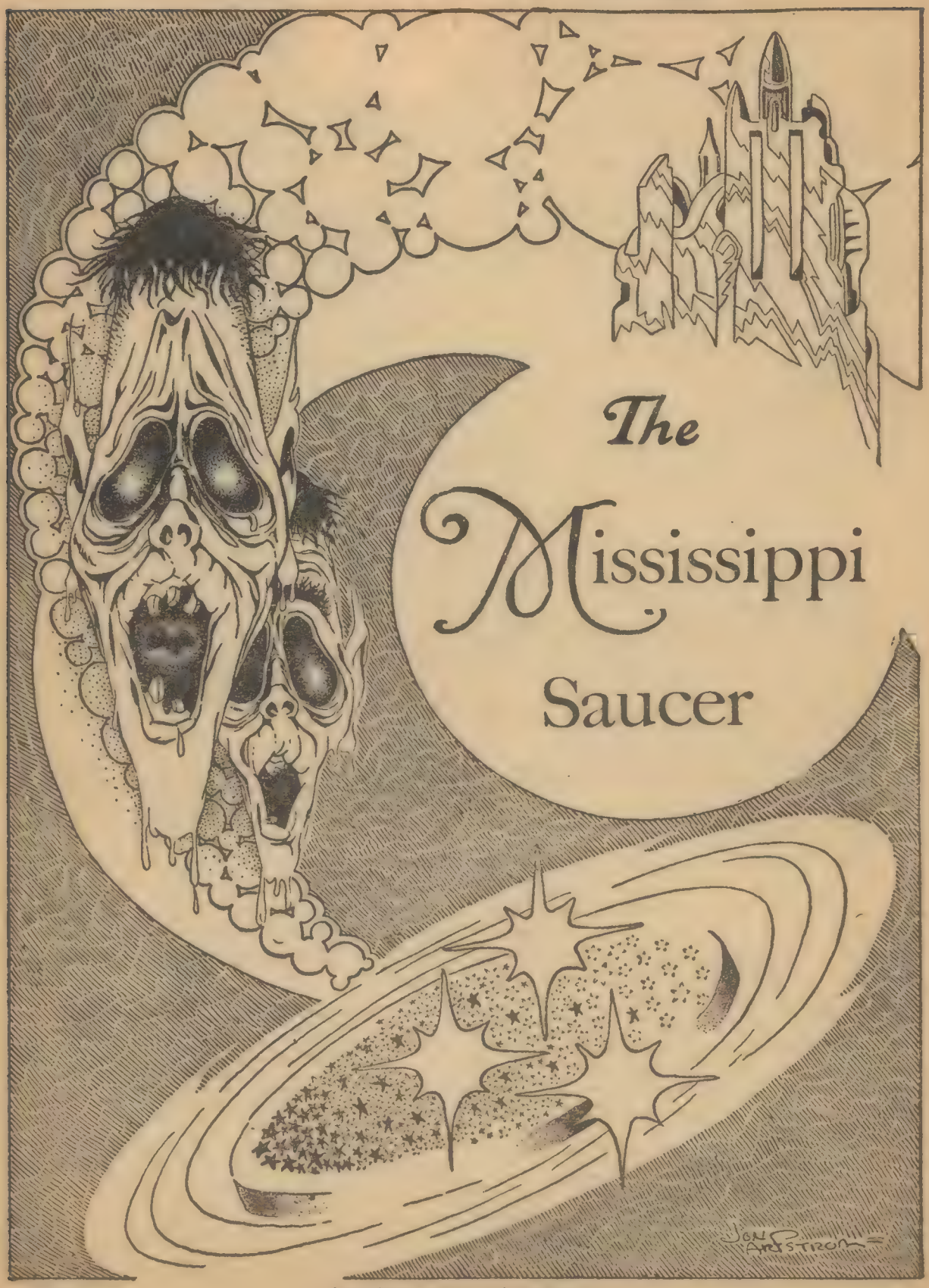
"Jim!" Barbara Maitland said.

Miles kept his eyes on the blotter, moving his shoulders ever so little, worrying about the ink.

"It's a little hard for me to say this, Jim! But could you forgive a girl for being blind —and a fool?"

Miles was a little slow in getting to his feet. But he wasn't slow in taking Barbara Maitland into his arms and crushing her to him in a tight, unyielding embrace, the throbbing at his temples blending with the steady droning of the ship.

*Something of the wonder that must have come to men seeking magic in the sky in days long vanished.*






**Heading by Jon Arfstrom**

# By Frank Belknap Long

JIMMY watched the *Natchez Belle* draw near, a shining eagerness in his stare. He stood on the deck of the shantyboat, his toes sticking out of his socks, his heart knocking against his ribs. Straight down the river the big packet boat came, purpling the water with its shadow, its smokestacks belching soot.

Jimmy had a wild talent for collecting things. He knew exactly how to infuriate the captains without sticking out his neck. Up and down the Father of Waters, from the bayous of Louisiana to the Great Sandy other little shantyboat boys envied Jimmy and tried hard to imitate him.

But Jimmy had a very special gift, a genius for pantomime. He'd wait until there was a glimmer of red flame on the river and small objects stood out with a startling clarity. Then he'd go into his act.

Nothing upset the captains quite so much as Jimmy's habit of holding a big, croaking bullfrog up by its legs as the riverboats went steaming past. It was a surefire way of reminding the captains that men and frogs were brothers under the skin. The puffed-out throat of the frog told the captains exactly what Jimmy thought of their cheek.

Jimmy refrained from making faces, or sticking out his tongue at the grinning roustabouts. It was the frog that did the trick.

In the still dawn things came sailing Jimmy's way, hurled by captains with a twinkle of repressed merriment dancing in eyes that were kindlier and more tolerant than Jimmy dreamed.

Just because shantyboat folk had no right to insult the riverboats Jimmy had collected forty empty tobacco tins, a down-at-heels shoe, a Sears Roebuck catalogue and—more rolled up newspapers than Jimmy could ever read.

Jimmy could read, of course. No matter how badly Uncle Al needed a new pair of shoes, Jimmy's education came first. So Jimmy had spent six winters ashore in a first-class grammar school, his books paid for out of Uncle Al's "New Orleans" money.

Uncle Al, blowing on a vinegar jug and making sweet music, the holes in his socks much bigger than the holes in Jimmy's socks. Uncle Al shaking his head and saying sadly, "Some day, young fella, I ain't gonna sit here harmonizing. No siree! I'm gonna buy myself a brand new store suit, trade in this here jig jug for a big round banjo, and hie myself off to the Mardi Gras. Ain't too old thataway to git a little fun out of life, young fella!"

Poor old Uncle Al. The money he'd saved up for the Mardi Gras never seemed to stretch far enough. There was enough kindness in him to stretch like a rainbow over the bayous and the river forests of sweet, rustling pine for as far as the eye could see. Enough kindness to wrap all of Jimmy's life in a glow, and the life of Jimmy's sister as well.

Jimmy's parents had died of winter pneumonia too soon to appreciate Uncle Al. But up and down the river everyone knew that Uncle Al was a great man.

ENEMIES? Well, sure, all great men made enemies, didn't they?

The Harmon brothers were downright sinful about carrying their feuding meanness right up to the doorstep of Uncle Al, if it could be said that a man living in a shantyboat had a doorstep.

Uncle Al made big catches and the Harmon brothers never seemed to have any luck. So, long before Jimmy was old enough to understand how corrosive envy could be the Harmon brothers had started feuding with Uncle Al.

"Jimmy, here comes the *Natchez Belle*! Uncle Al says for you to get him a newspaper. The newspaper you got him yesterday he couldn't read no-ways. It was soaking wet!"

Jimmy turned to glower at his sister. Up and down the river Pigtail Anne was known as a tomboy, but she wasn't—no-ways. She

was Jimmy's little sister. That meant Jimmy was the man in the family, and wore the pants, and nothing Pigtail said or did could change that for one minute.

"Don't yell at me!" Jimmy complained. "How can I get Captain Simmons mad if you get me mad first? Have a heart, will you?"

But Pigtail Anne refused to budge. Even when the *Natchez Belle* loomed so close to the shantyboat that it blotted out the sky she continued to crowd her brother, preventing him from holding up the frog and making Captain Simmons squirm.

But Jimmy got the newspaper anyway. Captain Simmons had a keen insight into tomboy psychology, and from the bridge of the *Natchez Belle* he could see that Pigtail was making life miserable for Jimmy.

True—Jimmy had no respect for packet boats and deserved a good trouncing. But what a scrapper the lad was! Never let it be said that in a struggle between the sexes the men of the river did not stand shoulder to shoulder.

The paper came sailing over the shining brown water like a white-bellied buffalo cat shot from a sling.

Pigtail grabbed it before Jimmy could give her a shove. Calmly she unwrapped it, her chin tilted in bellicose defiance.

As the *Natchez Belle* dwindled around a lazy, cypress-shadowed bend Pigtail Anne became a superior being, wrapped in a cosmopolitan aura. A wide-eyed little girl on a swaying deck, the great outside world rushing straight toward her from all directions.

Pigtail could take that world in her stride. She liked the fashion page best, but she was not above clicking her tongue at everything in the paper.

"Kidnap plot linked to airliner crash killing fifty," she read. "Red Sox blank Yanks! Congress sits today, vowing vengeance! Million dollar heiress elopes with a clerk! Court lets dog pick owner! Girl of eight kills her brother in accidental shooting!"

"I ought to push your face right down in the mud," Jimmy muttered.

"Don't you dare! I've a right to see what's going on in the world!"

"You said the paper was for Uncle Al!"

"It is—when I get finished with it."

Jimmy started to take hold of his sister's wrist and pry the paper from her clasp. Only started—for as Pigtail wriggled back sunlight fell on a shadowed part of the paper which drew Jimmy's gaze as sunlight draws dew.

*Exciting* wasn't the word for the headline. It seemed to blaze out of the page at Jimmy as he stared, his chin nudging Pigtail's shoulder.

NEW FLYING MONSTER REPORTED BLAZING GULF STATE SKIES

Jimmy snatched the paper and backed away from Pigtail, his eyes glued to the headline.

HE WAS kind to his sister, however. He read the news item aloud, if an account so startling could be called an item. To Jimmy it seemed more like a dazzling burst of light in the sky.

"A New Orleans resident reported today that he saw a big bright object 'roundish like a disk' flying north, against the wind. 'It was all lighted up from inside!' the observer stated. 'As far as I could tell there were no signs of life aboard the thing. It was much bigger than any of the flying saucers previously reported!' "

"People keep seeing them!" Jimmy muttered, after a pause. "Nobody knows where they come from! Saucers flying through the sky, high up at night. In the daytime, too! Maybe we're being *watched*, Pigtail!"

"Watched? Jimmy, what do you mean? What you talking about?"

Jimmy stared at his sister, the paper jiggling in his clasp. "It's way over your head, Pigtail!" he said sympathetically. "I'll prove it! What's a planet?"

"A star in the sky, you dope!" Pigtail almost screamed. "Wait'll Uncle Al hears what a meanie you are. If I wasn't your sister you wouldn't dare grab a paper that doesn't belong to you."

Jimmy refused to be enraged. "A planet's not a star, Pigtail," he said patiently. "A star's a big ball of fire like the sun. A planet is small and cool, like the Earth. Some of the planets may even have people on them. Not people like us, but people all the same. Maybe we're just frogs to them!"

"You're crazy, Jimmy! Crazy, crazy, you hear?"

Jimmy started to reply, then shut his mouth tight. Big waves were nothing new in the wake of steamboats, but the shantyboat wasn't just riding a swell. It was swaying and rocking like a floating barrel in the kind of blow Shantyboaters dreaded worse than the thought of dying.

Jimmy knew that a big blow could come up fast. Straight down from the sky in gusts, from all directions, banging against the boat like a drunken roustabout, slamming doors, tearing away mooring planks.

THE river could rise fast too. Under the lashing of a hurricane blowing up from the gulf the river could lift a shantyboat right out of the water, and smash it to smithereens against a tree.

But now the blow was coming from just one part of the sky. A funnel of wind was churning the river into a white froth and raising big swells directly offshore. But the river wasn't rising and the sun was shining in a clear sky.

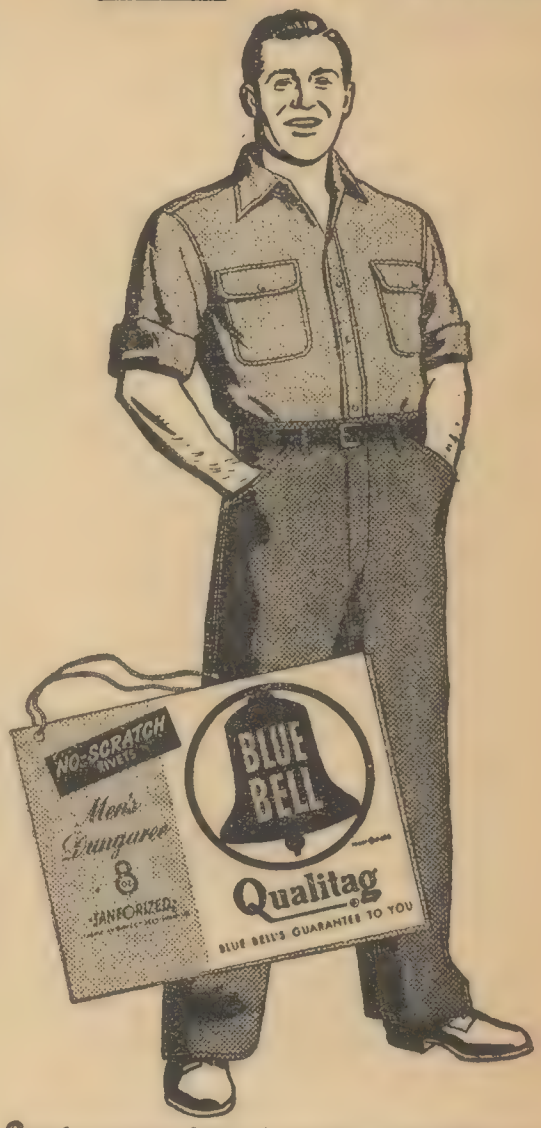
Jimmy knew a dangerous floodwater storm when he saw one. The sky had to be dark with rain, and you had to feel scared, in fear of drowning.

Jimmy was scared, all right. That part of it rang true. But a hollow, sick feeling in his chest couldn't mean anything by itself, he told himself fiercely.

Pigtail Anne saw the disk before Jimmy did. She screamed and pointed skyward, her twin braids standing straight out in the wind like the ropes on a bale of cotton, when smokestacks collapse and a savage howling sends the river ghosts scurrying for cover.

Straight down out of the sky the disk


# How to buy better work clothes

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swooped, a huge, spinning shape as flat as a buckwheat cake swimming in a golden haze of butterfat.

But the disk didn't remind Jimmy of a buckwheat cake. It made him think instead of a slowly turning wheel in the pilot house of a rotting old riverboat, a big, ghostly wheel manned by a steersman a century dead, his eye sockets filled with flickering swamp lights.

It made Jimmy want to run and hide. Almost it made him want to cling to his sister, content to let her wear the pants if only he could be spared the horror.

For there was something so chilling about the downsweeping disk that Jimmy's heart began leaping like a vinegar jug bobbing about in the wake of a capsizing fishboat.

Lower and lower the disk swept, trailing plumes of white smoke, lashing the water with a fearful blow. Straight down over the cypress wilderness that fringed the opposite bank, and then out across the river with a long-drawn whistling sound, louder than the air-sucking death gasps of a thousand buffalo cats.

Jimmy didn't see the disk strike the shining broad shoulders of the Father of Waters, for the bend around which the *Natchez Belle* had steamed so proudly hid the sky monster from view. But Jimmy did see the waterspout, spiraling skyward like the atom bomb explosion he'd goggled at in the pages of an old *Life* magazine, all smudged now with oily thumbprints.

Just a roaring for an instant—and a big white mushroom shooting straight up into the sky. Then, slowly, the mushroom decayed and fell back, and an awful stillness settled down over the river.

THE stillness was broken by a shrill cry from Pigtail Anne. "It was a flying saucer! Jimmy, we've seen one! We've seen one! We've—"

"Shut your mouth, Pigtail!"

Jimmy shaded his eyes and stared out across the river, his chest a throbbing ache.

He was still staring when a door creaked behind him.

Jimmy trembled. A tingling fear went through him, for he found it hard to realize that the disk had swept around the bend out of sight. To his overheated imagination it continued to fill all of the sky above him, overshadowing the shantyboat, making every sound a threat.

Sucking the still air deep into his lungs, Jimmy swung about.

Uncle Al was standing on the deck in a little pool of sunlight, his gaunt, hollow-cheeked face set in harsh lines. Uncle Al was shading his eyes too. But he was staring up the river, not down.

"Trouble, young fella," he grunted. "Sure as I'm a-standin' here. A barrelful o' trouble—headin' straight for us!"

Jimmy gulped and gestured wildly toward the bend. "It came down *over there*, Uncle Al!" he got out. "Pigtail saw it, too! A big, flying—"

"The Harmons are a-comin', young fella," Uncle Al drawled, silencing Jimmy with a wave of his hand. "Yesterday I rowed over a Harmon jug line without meanin' to. Now Jed Harmon's tellin' everybody I stole his fish!"

Very calmly Uncle Al cut himself a slice of the strongest tobacco on the river and packed it carefully in his pipe, wadding it down with his thumb.

He started to put the pipe between his teeth, then thought better of it.

"I can bone-feel the Harmon boat a-comin', young fella," he said, using the pipe to gesture with. "Smooth and quiet over the river like a moccasin snake."

Jimmy turned pale. He forgot about the disk and the mushrooming water spout. When he shut his eyes he saw only a red haze overhanging the river, and a shantyboat nosing out of the cypresses, its windows spitting death.

JIMMY knew that the Harmons had waited a long time for an excuse. The Harmons were law-respecting river rats with sharp teeth. Feuding wasn't lawful, but murder could be made lawful by whittling down a lie until it looked as sharp as the truth.

The Harmon brothers would do their whittling down with double-barreled shotguns. It was easy enough to make murder look like a lawful crime if you could point to a body covered by a blanket and say, "We caught him stealing our fish! He was a-goin' to kill us—so we got him first."

No one would think of lifting the blanket and asking Uncle Al about it. A man lying stiff and still under a blanket could no more make himself heard than a river cat frozen in the ice.

"Git inside, young 'uns. *Here they come*!"

Jimmy's heart skipped a beat. Down the river in the sunilght a shantyboat was drifting. Jimmy could see the Harmon brothers crouching on the deck, their faces livid with hate, sunlight glinting on their arm-cradled shotguns.

The Harmon brothers were not in the least alike. Jed Harmon was tall and gaunt, his right cheek puckered by a knife scar, his cruel, thin-lipped mouth snagged by his teeth. Joe Harmon was small and stout, a little round man with bushy eyebrows and the flabby face of a cottonmouth snake.

"Go inside, Pigtail," Jimmy said, calmly. "I'm a-going to stay and fight!"

UNCLE AL grabbed Jimmy's arm and swung him around. "You heard what I said, young fella. Now git!"

"I want to stay here and fight with you, Uncle Al," Jimmy said.

"Have you got a gun? Do you want to be blown apart, young fella?"

"I'm not scared, Uncle Al," Jimmy pleaded. "You might get wounded. I know how to shoot straight, Uncle Al. If you get hurt I'll go right on fighting!"

"No you won't, young fella! Take Pigtail inside. You hear me? You want me to take you across my knee and beat the livin' stuffings out of you?"

Silence.

Deep in his uncle's face Jimmy saw an anger he couldn't buck. Grabbing Pigtail Anne by the arm, he propelled her across the deck and into the dismal front room of the shantyboat.

The instant he released her she glared at him and stamped her foot. "If Uncle Al gets shot it'll be your fault," she said cruelly. Then Pigtail's anger really flared up.

"The Harmons wouldn't dare shoot us 'cause we're children!"

For an instant brief as a dropped heartbeat Jimmy stared at his sister with unconcealed admiration.

"You can be right smart when you've got nothing else on your mind, Pigtail," he said. "If they kill me they'll hang sure as shooting!"

Jimmy was out in the sunlight again before Pigtail could make a grab for him.

Out on the deck and running along the deck toward Uncle Al. He was still running when the first blast came.

IT DIDN'T sound like a shotgun blast. The deck shook and a big swirl of smoke floated straight toward Jimmy, half blinding him and blotting Uncle Al from view.

When the smoke cleared Jimmy could see the Harmon shantyboat. It was less than thirty feet away now, drifting straight past and rocking with the tide like a topheavy flatbarge.

On the deck Jed Harmon was crouching down, his gaunt face split in a triumphant smirk. Beside him Joe Harmon stood quivering like a mound of jelly, a stick of dynamite in his hand, his flabby face looking almost gentle in the slanting sunlight.

There was a little square box at Jed Harmon's feet. As Joe pitched Jed reached into the box for another dynamite stick. Jed was passing the sticks along to his brother, depending on wad dynamite to silence Uncle Al forever.

Wildly Jimmy told himself that the guns had been just a trick to mix Uncle Al up, and keep him from shooting until they had him where they wanted him.

Uncle Al was shooting now, his face as grim as death. His big heavy gun was leaping about like mad, almost hurling him to the deck.

Jimmy saw the second dynamite stick spinning through the air, but he never saw

it come down. All he could see was the smoke and the shantyboat rocking, and another terrible splintering crash as he went plunging into the river from the end of a rising plank, a sob strangling in his throat.

Jimmy struggled up from the river with the long leg-thrusts of a terrified bullfrog, his head a throbbing ache. As he swam shoreward he could see the cypresses on the opposite bank, dark against the sun, and something that looked like the roof of a house with water washing over it.

Then, with mud sucking at his heels, Jimmy was clinging to a slippery bank and staring out across the river, shading his eyes against the glare.

Jimmy thought, "I'm dreaming! I'll wake up and see Uncle Joe blowing on a vinegar jug. I'll see Pigtail, too. Uncle Al will be sitting on the deck, taking it easy!"

But Uncle Al wasn't sitting on the deck. There was no deck for Uncle Al to sit upon. Just the top of the shantyboat, sinking lower and lower, and Uncle Al swimming.

Uncle Al had his arm around Pigtail, and Jimmy could see Pigtail's white face bobbing up and down as Uncle Al breasted the tie with his strong right arm.

Closer to the bend was the Harmon shantyboat. The Harmons were using their shotguns now, blasting fiercely away at Uncle Al and Pigtail. Jimmy could see the smoke curling up from the leaping guns and the water jumping up and down in little spurts all about Uncle Al.

There was an awful hollow agony in Jimmy's chest as he stared, a fear that was partly a soundless screaming and partly a vision of Uncle Al sinking down through the dark water and turning it red.

It was strange, though. Something was happening to Jimmy, nibbling away at the outer edges of the fear like a big, hungry river cat. Making the fear seem less swollen and awful, shredding it away in little flakes.

There was a white core of anger in Jimmy which seemed suddenly to blaze up.

He shut his eyes tight.

In his mind's gaze Jimmy saw himself holding the Harmon brothers up by their long, mottled legs. The Harmon brothers were frogs. Not friendly, good-natured frogs like Uncle Al, but snake frogs. Cottonmouth frogs.

All flannel red were their mouths, and they had long evil fangs which dripped poison in the sunlight. But Jimmy wasn't afraid of them no-ways. Not any more. He had too firm a grip on their legs.

"Don't let anything happen to Uncle Al and Pigtail!" Jimmy whispered, as though he were talking to himself. No—not exactly to himself. To someone like himself, only larger. Very close to Jimmy, but larger, more powerful.

"Catch them before they harm Uncle Al! Hurry! *Hurry*!"

There was a strange lifting sensation in Jimmy's chest now. As though he could shake the river if he tried hard enough, tilt it, send it swirling in great thunderous white surges clear down to Lake Pontchartrain.

BUT Jimmy didn't want to tilt the river. Not with Uncle Al on it and Pigtail, and all those people in New Orleans who would disappear right off the streets. They were frogs too, maybe, but good frogs. Not like the Harmon brothers.

Jimmy had a funny picture of himself much younger than he was. Jimmy saw himself as a great husky baby, standing in the middle of the river and blowing on it with all his might. The waves rose and rose, and Jimmy's cheeks swelled out and the river kept getting angrier.

No—he must fight that.

"Save Uncle Al!" he whispered fiercely. "Just save him—and Pigtail!"

It began to happen the instant Jimmy opened his eyes. Around the bend in the sunlight came a great spinning disk, wrapped in a fiery glow.

Straight toward the Harmon shantyboat the disk swept, water spurting up all about it, its bottom fifty feet wide. There was no collision. Only a brightness for one awful instant where the shantyboat was twisting and turning in the current, a brightness that outshone the rising sun.

Just like a camera flashbulb going off, but bigger, brighter. So big and bright that Jimmy could see the faces of the Harmon brothers fifty times as large as life, shriveling and disappearing in a magnifying burst of flame high above the cypress trees. Just as though a giant in the sky had trained a big burning glass on the Harmon brothers and whipped it back quick.

Whipped it straight up, so that the faces would grow huge before dissolving as a warning to all snakes. There was an evil anguish in the dissolving faces which made Jimmy's blood run cold. Then the disk was alone in the middle of the river, spinning around and around, the shantyboat swallowed up.

And Uncle Al was still swimming, fearfully close to it.

The net came swirling out of the disk over Uncle Al like a great, dew-drenched gossamer web. It enmeshed him as he swam, so gently that he hardly seemed to struggle or even to be aware of what was happening to him.

Pigtail didn't resist, either. She simply stopped thrashing in Uncle Al's arms, as though a great wonder had come upon her.

Slowly Uncle Al and Pigtail were drawn into the disk. Jimmy could see Uncle Al reclining in the web, with Pigtail in the crook of his arm, his long, angular body as quiet as a butterfly in its deep winter sleep inside a swaying glass cocoon.

Uncle Al and Pigtail, being drawn together into the disk as Jimmy stared, a dull pounding in his chest. After a moment the pounding subsided and a silence settled down over the river.

Jimmy sucked in his breath. The voices began quietly, as though they had been waiting for a long time to speak to Jimmy deep inside his head, and didn't want to frighten him in any way.

"Take it easy, Jimmy! Stay where you are. We're just going to have a friendly little talk with Uncle Al."

"A t-talk?" Jimmy heard himself stammering.

"We knew we'd find you where life flows

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simply and serenely, Jimmy. Your parents took care of that before they left you with Uncle Al.

"You see, Jimmy, we wanted you to study the Earth people on a great, wide flowing river, far from the cruel, twisted places. To grow up with them, Jimmy—and to understand them. Especially the Uncle Als. For Uncle Al is unspoiled, Jimmy. If there's any hope at all for Earth as we guide and watch it, that hope burns most brightly in the Uncle Als!"

The voice paused, then went on quickly. "You see, Jimmy, you're not human in the same way that your sister is human—or Uncle Al. But you're still young enough to feel human, and we want you to feel human, Jimmy."

"W—Who are you?" Jimmy gasped.

"We are the Shining Ones, Jimmy! For wide wastes of years we have cruised Earth's skies, almost unnoticed by the Earth people. When darkness wraps the Earth in a great, spinning shroud we hide our ships close to the cities, and glide through the silent streets in search of our young. You see, Jimmy, we must watch and protect the young of our race until sturdiness comes upon them, and they are ready for the Great Change."

FOR an instant there was a strange, humming sound deep inside Jimmy's head, like the drowsy murmur of bees in a dew-drenched clover patch. Then the voice droned on. "The Earth people are frightened by our ships now, for their cruel wars have put a great fear of death in their hearts. They watch the skies with sharper eyes, and their minds have groped closer to the truth.

"To the Earth people our ships are no longer the fireballs of mysterious legend, haunted will-o'-the-wisps, marsh flickerings and the even more illusive distortions of the sick in mind. It is a long bold step from fireballs to flying saucers, Jimmy. A day will come when the Earth people will be wise enough to put aside fear. Then we can show ourselves to them as we really are, and help them openly."

The voice seemed to take more complete possession of Jimmy's thoughts then, growing louder and more eager, echoing through his mind with the persuasiveness of muted chimes.

"Jimmy, close your eyes tight. We're going to take you across wide gulfs of space to the bright and shining land of your birth."

Jimmy obeyed.

It was a city, and yet it wasn't like New York or Chicago or any of the other cities Jimmy had seen illustrations of in the newspapers and picture magazines.

The buildings were white and domed and shining, and they seemed to tower straight up into the sky. There were streets, too, weaving in and out between the domes like rainbow-colored spider webs in a forest of mushrooms.

THERE were no people in the city, but down the aerial streets shining objects swirled with the swift easy gliding of flat stones skimming an edge of running water.

Then as Jimmy stared into the depths of the strange glow behind his eyelids the city dwindled and fell away, and he saw a huge circular disk looming in a wilderness of shadows. Straight toward the disk a shining object moved, bearing aloft on filaments of flame a much smaller object that struggled and mewed and reached out little white arms.

Closer and closer the shining object came, until Jimmy could see that it was carrying a human infant that stared straight at Jimmy out of wide, dark eyes. But before he could get a really good look at the shining object it pierced the shadows and passed into the disk.

There was a sudden, blinding burst of light, and the disk was gone.

Jimmy opened his eyes.

"You were once like that baby, Jimmy!" the voice said. "You were carried by your parents into a waiting ship, and then out across wide gulfs of space to Earth.

"You see, Jimmy, our race was once entirely human. But as we grew to maturity we left the warm little worlds where our

infancy was spent, and boldly sought the stars, shedding our humanness as sunlight sheds the dew, or a bright, soaring moth of the night its ugly pupa case.

"We grew great and wise, Jimmy, but not quite wise enough to shed our human heritage of love and joy and heartbreak. In our childhood we must return to the scenes of our past, to take root again in familiar soil, to grow in power and wisdom slowly and sturdily, like a seed dropped back into the loam which nourished the great flowering mother plant.

"Or like the eel of Earth's seas, Jimmy, that must be spawned in the depths of the great cold ocean, and swim slowly back to the bright highlands and the shining rivers of Earth. Young eels do not resemble their parents, Jimmy. They're white and thin and transparent and have to struggle hard to survive and grow up.

"Jimmy, you were planted here by your parents to grow wise and strong. Deep in your mind you knew that we had come to seek you out, for we are all born human, and are bound one to another by that knowledge, and that secret trust.

"You knew that we would watch over you and see that no harm would come to you. You called out to us, Jimmy, with all the strength of your mind and heart. Your Uncle Al was in danger and you sensed our nearness.

"It was partly your knowledge that saved him, Jimmy. But it took courage too, and a willingness to believe that you were more than human, and armed with the great proud strength and wisdom of the Shining Ones."

THE voice grew suddenly gentle, like a caressing wind.

"You're not old enough yet to go home, Jimmy! Or wise enough. We'll take you home when the time comes. Now we just want to have a talk with Uncle Al, to find out how you're getting along."

Jimmy looked down into the river and then up into the sky. Deep down under the dark, swirling water he could see life taking shape in a thousand forms. Caddis flies building bright, shining new nests, and dragonfly nymphs crawling up toward the sunlight, and pollywogs growing sturdy hindlimbs to conquer the land.

But there were cottonmouths down there too, with death behind their fangs, and no love for the life that was crawling upward. When Jimmy looked up into the sky he could see all the blazing stars of space, with cottonmouths on every planet of every sun.

Uncle Al was like a bright caddis fly building a fine new nest, thatched with kindness, denying himself bright little Mardi Gras pleasures so that Jimmy could go to school and grow wiser than Uncle Al.

"That's right, Jimmy. You're growing up—we can see that! Uncle Al says he told you to hide from the cottonmouths. But you were ready to give your life for your sister and Uncle Al."

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"Shucks, it was nothing!" Jimmy heard himself protesting.

"Uncle Al doesn't think so. And neither do we!"

A LONG silence while the river mists seemed to weave a bright cocoon of radiance about Jimmy clinging to the bank, and the great circular disk that had swallowed up Uncle Al.

Then the voices began again. "No reason why Uncle Al shouldn't have a little fun out of life, Jimmy. Gold's easy to make and we'll make some right now. A big lump of gold in Uncle Al's hand won't hurt him in any way."

"Whenever he gets any spending money he gives it away!" Jimmy gulped.

"I know, Jimmy. But he'll listen to you. Tell him you want to go to New Orleans, too!"

Jimmy looked up quickly then. In his heart was something of the wonder he'd felt when he'd seen his first riverboat and waited for he knew not what. Something of the wonder that must have come to men seeking magic in the sky, the rainmakers of ancient tribes and of days long vanished.

Only to Jimmy the wonder came now with a white burst of remembrance and recognition.

It was as though he could sense something of himself in the two towering spheres that rose straight up out of the water behind the disk. Still and white and beautiful they were, like bubbles floating on a rainbow sea with all the stars of space behind them.

Staring at them, Jimmy saw himself as he would be, and knew himself for what he was. It was not a glory to be long endured.

"Now you must forget again, Jimmy! Forget as Uncle Al will forget—until we come for you. Be a little shantyboat boy! You are safe on the wide bosom of the Father of Waters. Your parents planted you in a rich and kindly loam, and in all the finite universes you will find no cosier nook, for life flows here with a diversity that is infinite and—*Pigtail*! She gets on your nerves at times, doesn't she, Jimmy?"

"She sure does," Jimmy admitted.

"Be patient with her, Jimmy. She's the only human sister you'll ever have on Earth."

"I—I'll try!" Jimmy muttered.

UNCLE Al and Pigtail came out of the disk in an amazingly simple way. They just seemed to float out, in the glimmering web. Then, suddenly, there wasn't any disk on the river at all—just a dull flickering where the sky had opened like a great, blazing furnace to swallow it up.

"I was just swimmin' along with Pigtail, not worryin' too much, 'cause there's no sense in worryin' when death is starin' you in the face," Uncle Al muttered, a few minutes later.

Uncle Al sat on the riverbank beside Jimmy, staring down at his palm, his vision misted a little by a furious blinking.

"It's gold, Uncle Al!" Pigtail shrilled. "A big lump of solid gold—"

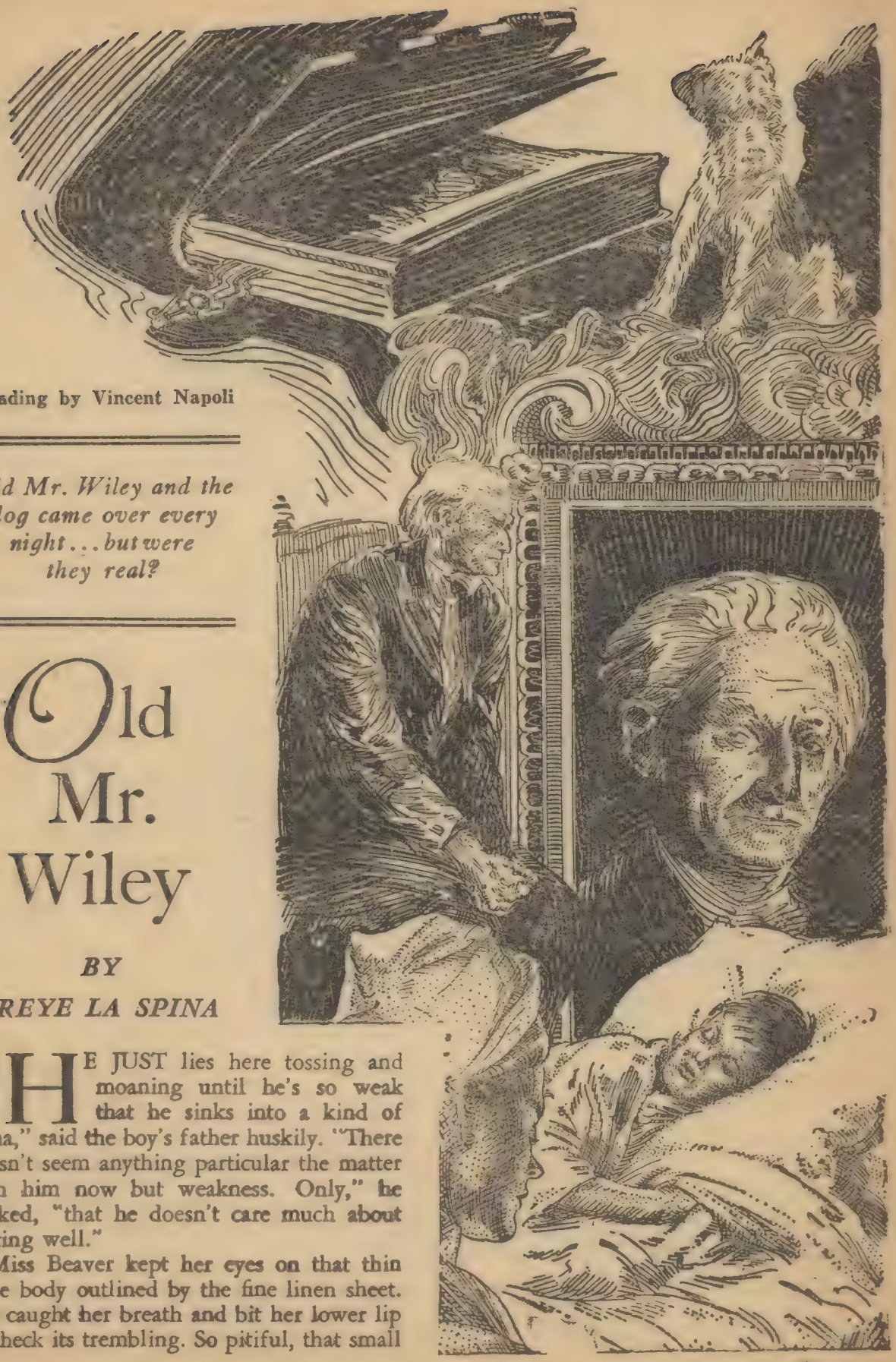
"I just felt my hand get heavy and there it was, young fella, nestling there in my palm!"

Jimmy didn't seem to be able to say anything.

"High school books don't cost no more than grammar school books, young fella," Uncle Al said, his face a sudden shining. "Next winter you'll be a-goin' to high school, sure as I'm a-sittin' here!"

For a moment the sunlight seemed to blaze so brightly about Uncle Al that Jimmy couldn't even see the holes in his socks.

Then Uncle Al made a wry face. "Someday, young fella, when your books are all paid for, I'm gonna buy myself a brand new store suit, and hie myself off to the Mardi Gras. Ain't too old thataway to git a little fun out of life, young fella!"



Heading by Vincent Napoli

*Old Mr. Wiley and the dog came over every night . . . but were they real?*

# Old Mr. Wiley

***BY***

***GREYE LA SPINA***

"HE JUST lies here tossing and moaning until he's so weak that he sinks into a kind of coma," said the boy's father huskily. "There doesn't seem anything particular the matter with him now but weakness. Only," he choked, "that he doesn't care much about getting well."

Miss Beaver kept her eyes on that thin little body outlined by the fine linen sheet. She caught her breath and bit her lower lip to check its trembling. So pitiful, that small

scion of a long line of highly placed aristocratic and wealthy forebears, that her cool, capable hand went out involuntarily to soothe the fevered childish brow. She wanted suddenly to gather the little body into her warm arms, against her kind breast. Her emotion, she realized, was far from professional; Frank Wiley IV had somehow laid a finger on her heartstrings.

"If you can rouse him from this lethargy and help him find some interest in living," Frank Wiley III said thickly, "you won't find me unappreciative, Miss Beaver."

The nurse contemplated that small, apathetic patient in silence. Doctor Parris had warned her that unless the boy's interest could somehow be stimulated, the little fellow would die from sheer lack of incentive to live. Her emotion moistened her eyes and constricted her throat muscles. She had to clear her throat before she could speak.

"I can only promise to do my very best for this dear little boy," she said hurriedly. "No human being can do more than his best."

"Doctor Parris tells me you have been uniformly successful with the cases he's put you on. I hope," the young father entreated, "that you'll follow your usual precedent."

"The doctor is too kind," murmured Miss Beaver with slightly lifted brows. "I fear he gives me more credit than I deserve."

"There I hope you're wrong. He calls you an intuitive psychic. It is upon your intuitions that I'm banking now. My affection hampers me from fathoming Frank's innermost thoughts. If I were really *sure* what he needed most, I'd get it for him if it were a spotted giraffe," declared his father passionately. "But I'm unable to go deeply enough into his real thoughts."

"If his own father cannot think of something he would care for enough to make him want to live, how can an outsider find out what he might be wanting?" argued the nurse, a touch of resentment in her voice. "Would not his own mother know what would make him want to take hold on life?"

There was an awkward pause.

"His mother," began Frank Wiley III and was interrupted by a light tap on the door panel, at which he went silent, turning away as if relieved to escape any explanation.

The door swung open, permitting the entrance of a young and very pretty woman, one who knew exactly what a charming picture she made in jade negligee over peach pajamas. About her exceedingly well-shaped head ash-blonde hair lay in close artificial waves. She was such a distinctively blonde type that Miss Beaver could not control her slightly startled downward glance at the dark child tossing on the bed. Her upward look of bewilderment was met by Frank Wiley's faint smile.

"He takes after the founder of our family," said he in a low, almost confidential voice. "His great-grandfather was said to have had Indian blood in his veins, as well as a touch of old Spain. The boy doesn't look like his mother or me. He's a real throw-back."

The pretty woman had come across the room, pettishly lifting her silk clad shoulders. Through the straps of embroidered sandals red-tipped toes wriggled. At the tumbled bed and its small restless occupant she threw what appeared to Miss Beaver a distasteful glance, ignoring the nurse entirely although she had not met her previously and must have known that the strange young woman was the new night nurse.

"Do come to bed, Frank," she urged crossly, placing a proprietory hand on her husband's coat sleeve. "It won't do you any good to moon around in here and it might disturb Francis."

Miss Beaver stood by her patient's bed, her clear gray eyes full upon young Mrs. Wiley. The nurse experienced a kind of disgust, together with one of those uncomfortable intuitions upon the reliability of which Doctor Parris was always depending. She knew, all at once, that Mrs. Wiley was that strange type of modern woman which makes a cult of personal beauty, taking wifehood lightly and submitting to maternity as infrequently as possible.

"I suppose you're right, Florry," the father conceded, with a last solicitous look at the exhausted child. "Miss Beaver . . .?"

The nurse nodded, her lips a tight red line.

"It would be better for the patient if the room were quiet and darkened," she said with decision.

WHEN the door had closed behind the pair, Miss Beaver busied herself making the child more comfortable for the night. She smoothed out the cool linen sheets, drawing them taut under the wasted little body. She bathed the hot face with water and alcohol. To all her ministrations the child submitted in a kind of lethargy, speaking no word, making no sign that he had noticed a different attendant. When she had quite finished, he breathed a long sigh of relaxation; his quivering, weak little body went suddenly limp, and Miss Beaver had a good scare as she bent over him, trying to bring back that weary and reluctant spirit to its exhausted mortal domicile.

It was by then nearly half past seven, The child lay supine; heavy-lidded eyes half opened upon this tormentress who had somehow succeeded in calling him back into the dimly lighted room from the shadows of Lethe's alluring banks. Miss Beaver, kneeling beside young Frank's bed, talked tenderly to him in a soft monotone. She made all manner of gratuitous promises, if only Frank would try like a good boy to get well. She told him firmly that he could, if he wanted to. She made her suggestions with gently persuasive voice, coloring all she said with the warmth of a heart peculiarly open to the unknown needs of the listless child. To those unknown needs she opened wide her spirit, crying within for enlightenment and help.

While she was thus occupied, she became aware of that sensation of being watched that is so startling when one considers oneself alone. Without rising, she turned her face quickly from the pillow of young Frank and looked across the bed. A member of the household about whom Doctor Parris had neglected to tell her was standing there, one finger on his lips which, though firm, wore a reassuring smile that immediately conveyed his warm friendliness. He was a well preserved elderly gentleman of aristocratic mien, clad in a bright blue garment of odd cut, his neck wound about with spotlessly white linen in lieu of a starched collar. His high nose, raised cheek-bones, flashing black eyes and olive skin contrasted in lively fashion with a heavy mane of white hair. His eyes as well as his lips conveyed a kindliness which Miss Beaver's answering smile reciprocated.

Tapping his lips again with admonitory forefinger, the old gentleman now produced, with a broad smile, something from beneath his right arm. Leaning down, he set this carefully beside the listless child. As he put it down, it gave a whining little cry.

Young Frank's eyes widened incredulously. Miss Beaver kept him under intent regard as he turned his dark head on the pillow to see what it was that was sitting on the bed.

"Oh!" he cried in a kind of rapture and put one thin white hand outside the covers

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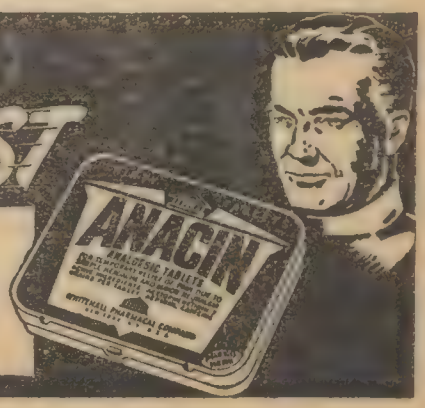


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to touch the small creature that now stood wagging a brief tail in friendly fashion. "Is it mine?"

The child looked up at the old gentleman who once more, with serious mien and a significant movement of his head toward the door, gestured for silence. The boy's eyes blinked once or twice; then with a weak but ecstatic smile he laid a pale hand upon the furry coat of the little dog that began to bounce about, licking the hand that caressed it.

Miss Beaver told herself that the old gentleman had found a way to lay hold on young Frank's reluctant spirit. She watched color creep into the boy's face as he cuddled the little dog blissfully, and she drew a deep breath of heart-felt relief when the heavy eyelids drooped and the boy slipped off into a natural sleep, nothing like the heavy coma from which she had struggled so hard to bring him back earlier that night.

She looked up thankfully to meet the understanding gaze of the old gentleman who with that gesture of admonishment bent over and picked up the dog, tucked it under his blue-sleeved arm and went across the room to the door. He did not speak but Miss Beaver received the vivid impression that his visit would be repeated the following night; it was as if her sensitive intuitions could receive and register a wordless message from that other sympathetic soul.

The following morning found the lad refreshed and improved. His first waking thought was for the dog and in reply to his cautiously whispered inquiry Miss Beaver whispered back that his grandfather (the strong family resemblance made her sure it had been the boy's wise grandfather who had found a means of rousing the child from an all-but-fatal lethargy) had taken it with him but would bring it again that night. Miss Beaver wondered at herself for promising this but felt somehow sure that old Mr. Wiley would bring the pup without fail. She believed that she had read indomitable determination in those piercing black eyes; she knew inwardly that he would not rest until he had found that thing which would give young Frank renewed interest in living.

Although the child appeared, if anything, a trifle less apathetic the following day and Miss Beaver felt that each succeeding visit of old Mr. Wiley with the fox-terrier would give the lad another push toward convalescence, yet the nurse did not feel inclined to mention openly that secret visit in the dead of night. The old gentleman's finger tapping his gravely smiling lips was one thing that restrained her; the other was the irritation betrayed, ingenuously enough, by the boy's mother during her early morning visit to the sickroom.

YOUNG Mrs. Wiley looked especially pretty in a pleated jade sports skirt, a white pullover sweater, a jade beret on her fair hair. Under one arm she carried a small white Pomeranian about whose neck flared a matching wide jade satin bow.

"Well, how is Francis this morning?" she inquired briskly with the determined manner of one dutifully performing an unpleasant task. "He looks better, doesn't he?"

Miss Beaver, to whom this inquiry was addressed, nodded shortly.

The boy did not look at his pretty young mother after his first indifferent glance as she entered the room. He lay in silence with closed eyes and compressed lips, a most unchildlike expression on his thin boyish face.

"Look, Francis! See how sweet Kiki looks with this big green bow!"

Mrs. Wiley dropped the Pomeranian on the bed. The dog snarled and snapped viciously. Frank thrust out one hand and gave the animal a pettish push. Bestowing a hard, cold glare on her son, Mrs. Wiley snatched up the growling dog in high indignation.

"There! I ask you, nurse, if that child isn't just unnatural. I thought boys liked dogs. Francis is queer. I believe he actually hates Kiki." She lifted the dog against her face, permitting it to loll its pink tongue against her carefully rouged cheek. "Pwecious . . . Was it muvver's own pwecious ikkle Kiki? Francis," she addressed her son sharply, "you'll have to get over your nasty ugliness to poor little Kiki. It's a shame, the way you hate dogs!"

"But I don't hate dogs!" cried the boy vehemently, his voice breaking with indignant resentment. "It's just Kiki. I'd love to have a little dog of my very own, Mother. If you'd only let me have a little dog of my very own!" The faint voice died away in a sick wail. The boy's eyelids closed tightly against gushing tears.

Mrs. Wiley gave a short exclamation of impatience.

"Francis has the idea that a dirty mongrel would be nicer than a beautiful pedigreed dog like Kiki," she cried disgustedly.

"But why not try letting him have a dog of his own?" asked Miss Beaver ill-advisedly, her interest getting the better of her. "Perhaps it would give him interest enough . . ."

"Nonsense!" snapped Mrs. Wiley sharply. "I won't have street mutts wandering around the house to irritate poor little Kiki. Nasty smelly common mongrels with fleas. Indeed not. I'm surprised at you, nurse, for making the suggestion."

With that, young Mrs. Wiley removed her vivid presence from the room, leaving Miss Beaver shrugging her shoulders and raising her eyebrows. And the little boy crying softly, the sheet pulled over his dark head.

"What's all this, Frankie?" asked the father's voice.

"*She* won't let me have a dog of my own," sobbed the boy, coming out from under the concealing sheet, lips a-quiver, eyes humid.

Miss Beaver's lips compressed. He called his mother "She" as if she were an outsider . . .

Frank Wiley III stood for a moment looking at his son, then let himself gently down on the edge of the bed, laying one big palm on the little chap's hot forehead. He did not speak, just sat and stroked the fevered brow with tenderness. On his face a dark look brooded. His eyes were absent, unhappy.

"Daddy, why couldn't I have just a *little* puppy of my own?"

The father replied with obvious effort.

"You know, Frankie, we have one small dog already," said he with forced lightness.

"Oh! Kiki!"

"Couldn't you manage to make friends with Kiki?"

"*She* doesn't really want Kiki to like me, Daddy." (Wise beyond his years, marvelled Miss Beaver.) "Kiki doesn't really like little boys."

"Oh, my God, Frankie, don't go to crying again! Don't you see that Daddy can't quarrel with Mother over a dog? Try to get well, old man, and we'll see then what we can do. How about a pony, son?"

The little boy disappeared under the sheet, refusing to reply. Miss Beaver could not bear his convulsive, hardly-controlled sobs, and turned an accusing face upon Frank Wiley III.

"Is it possible," she asked icily, "that Frank's mother would actually refuse him so small a thing as a puppy, if it meant the merest chance of his getting better?"

The face turned to hers was gloomy, the voice impatient.

"Oh, good God! Was ever a man in such a damnable situation? My dear Miss Beaver, ask the doctor to tell you how much influence I have in this household, before you blame me for not taking a firm stand with a woman as nervous and temperamental as Mrs. Wiley. I'd give my life willingly to bring my boy back to health but unhappily I'm not like the founders of our family. Some day I'll show you our family album. You'll find it easy to trace the strong resemblance Frankie has to his forebears. It's the damnably high spirit he gets from them that is so stubbornly killing him now."

HE ROSE, wheeled about and went to the door. Paused. Still with that brooding dark look on his face he turned to her again.

"If my death would make it any easier for Frank, I wouldn't hesitate a moment. I'm a failure. It wouldn't matter. But I feel that by living and watching over him I'm standing between my boy's development as an individual, and the subtlest, softest peril that could possibly threaten him. I would rather he died, if he cannot bring about what he wills for his own development. As

for me, I . . . I am a dead man walking futilely among the living."

With that, he swung out of the room.

Miss Beaver knelt by the boy's bed, murmuring persuasively to him as she strove to make him check his hysterical sobs.

"Frankie, you really must stop crying. You're too big a chap to cry and it only makes you worse. If you're a good boy today and eat your food, I'll let your grandfather bring the little dog tonight," she promised rashly.

The sheet turned down and Frank's reddened face peered at her plaintively.

"That was my *great*-grandfather," he assured her gravely.

"Well, great or great-great, it's all the same," she conceded good-humoredly.

"Do you really think he'll bring Spot tonight?"

"Of course he will. But you must eat your meals, take a long nap, and stop crying."

"Oh, I promise!" the boy cried eagerly.

The day, Miss Beaver was told later, was uneventful. She had remained with the day nurse until Doctor Parris had made his visit. The doctor had been much pleased to find his small patient in good spirits and congratulated himself upon having put Miss Beaver on the case.

"If our young friend continues to improve like this, Miss Beaver," he joked, "we'll have him playing football within a month." He lowered his voice for her ear only. "Has anything particular come under your notice that might account for this agreeable change?"

Miss Beaver's forehead wrinkled slightly. She regarded the doctor from narrowed, thoughtful eyes.

"Tell me, Doctor Parris, if it isn't asking too much, why Mr. Wiley is a Man-Afraid-of-his-Wife?"

The doctor could not repress an involuntary chuckle.

"Come now, nurse, don't you think you're asking rather a good deal?"

"No, I don't," retorted Miss Beaver shortly. "Nor do you think so, either. What I'm trying to get at is, why Mr. Wiley lets Mrs. Wiley prevent him from giving Frank a puppy that he wants?"

The doctor regarded her thoughtfully.

"So it's a pup the boy wants. Ha, hum!" he uttered.

"I'm asking you," she repeated impatiently.

"Oh! Eh! Well! Mrs. Wiley, you have undoubtedly discerned, is one of those self-centered egotists who simply cannot permit people to live any way but her way. She won't have another dog in the house because it might interfere with the comfort of that silly damn—excuse me—Pom of hers. If Frank were a bit older and could feign a penchant for the Pom and his mother got the idea that the animal's affection might be alienated from her, she would at once get the child another dog, just to keep him away from Kiki."

"All of which sounds subtle but isn't very helpful," decided Miss Beaver with unflattering directness. "I've told Mr. Wiley that I thought a dog might interest his son and Mr. Wiley replies that his wife won't let him get one. There is something more behind this and it's obvious you don't want to tell me."

"Oh, hang it, nurse! You always manage to get your own way with me, don't you? I'll probably have to marry you one of these days, so I can keep the upper hand," he grinned. "Well, then, Wiley is a weak sister and oughtn't to be. He's completely under his chorus-girl wife's thumb. He lost a good bit in Wall Street and what's left is in her name, so he's got to watch his step until he's recouped his losses.

"If he were like his father or his grandfather . . . but he isn't," snapped the doctor vexedly. "Now, this boy here, he's a throwback, young Frank is. He's the spittin' image of the founder of the family and I'm willing to wager he's got the grit and determination that once endowed old Frank Wiley I."

"I've observed," murmured Miss Beaver, "that you and his father call the boy Frank, while his mother refers to him as Francis."

"That's her hifalutin way of putting on the dog," nurse," Doctor Parris grinned wickedly. "His name on the birth certificate is Frank but she'd make a girlish Francis

of him if she had her own way. For some reason she isn't getting it. Her husband sticks to the old family name of Frank and the boy won't answer to Francis.

"She has a healthy respect for the first old Frank Wiley. If you were to see the family album, nurse, you'd be quick to catch the look in the old boy's eyes. Nobody ever put anything over on that lad, believe me."

"I've no doubt of that," thought Miss Beaver to herself, the indomitable countenance of her midnight visitor clear before her mind's eye. It was astonishing, that strong family resemblance. Aloud she snapped: "Family album, indeed! What I'm after is to get permission for this child to have a pet. I'm positive it would make all the difference in the world to him."

"You won't get permission, nurse. Mrs. Frank won't have any other pets around to bother precious Kiki," he said grimly.

"Not if it's a matter of life or death?" she persisted.

"She would laugh at your putting it just that way," growled the doctor, an absent expression stealing over his kindly face.

"Well, we'll see what we'll see," observed Miss Beaver cryptically, her mouth an ominous tight red line.

THE doctor suddenly spoke close to her ear, an odd note in his voice. "I'm going to prescribe something very unusual, nurse. Tomorrow night a covered basket will be delivered here for you. Take it into the boy's room and open it if he wakens during the night. Understand?"

"I can't say I do, Dr. Parris."

"You will," he promised. "I'll take that basket and its contents when I come around for my morning call. Unless," he told her grimly, "I can see my way to make the prescription stick."

It was with the utmost anxiety that Miss Beaver awaited the coming that night of old Mr. Wiley. The day nurse had told her that Frank had eaten a good lunch and what for him was a hearty supper. He had agreed to sleep if he were awakened the moment Spot arrived, and Miss Beaver had accepted his whispered offer. To her relief, he fell asleep immediately, natural color on his thin cheeks.

Mr. Wiley's light tap came on the door panel. She met his grave smile with a soft exclamation of welcome. The small dog was tucked under one arm and he paused to warn her with that admonitory touch of one finger to his lips that the secret of his visits must be preserved. She nodded comprehension, leaned over the sleeping boy and whispered softly in his ear.

He stirred, opened drowsy eyes. Then he pulled himself up on his pillow, reaching thin hands out to the spotted dog which nipped playfully at him.

"Isn't he wonderful? When may I have him all the time?"

"When you're well and don't need a night nurse," promised Miss Beaver rashly and was rewarded by a broad smile from the courtly old gentleman who tipped back his white-maned head and laughed silently but whole-heartedly.

"I'll get well at once, nurse. Don't you

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think I might be well enough tomorrow? Or the day after? Not," he added politely, making Miss Beaver's heart ache with his childish apology, "not that I want you to leave, you know."

"That will be for the doctor to decide, Frank. But the more you eat and sleep and grow happy in your heart, the faster you'll get well," advised Miss Beaver earnestly.

For a long happy hour young Frank fraternized with the fox-terrier while the old gentleman sat silently observing him, a grimly humorous smile hovering about his firm lips. Then the boy's eyes began to cloud sleepily and much to Miss Beaver's surprise and pleasure Frank relinquished his canine playmate and fell asleep, a blissful smile curving his childish mouth as he breathed with soft regularity.

Then old Mr. Wiley picked up the puppy, tucked it under one blue-clad arm and again admonishing Miss Beaver with a finger athwart his lips, tiptoed from the room, closing the door behind very gently.

The nurse thought with a sigh of relief that the old gentleman had looked both pleased and gratified. She herself could hardly wait for morning, and for the day to pass, and was both pleased and encouraged herself when she went on duty the next night. Frank had asked to sit up for supper and when Miss Beaver entered the room he manfully refused the day nurse's assistance back to bed. The day nurse's uplifted brows betrayed her astonishment at the sudden turn for the better the young patient had taken.

"I'm almost well," piped up Frank Wiley IV, the moment the door closed behind the day nurse. "Tomorrow, the doctor says, I can sit out in the garden in the sun. Couldn't I have Spot then?"

"You just leave that to me," said Miss Beaver determinedly. "I may have much to say about your keeping Spot, Frank."

In her heart she was in reality panic-stricken for she knew that pretty Mrs. Wiley would indifferently laugh off the idea that ownership of a dog could mean returned health to her little son. Upon Frank Wiley III Miss Beaver felt no reliance could be placed; he was an uxorious weakling. Her unfounded hope rested on old Mr. Wiley alone; old Mr. Wiley whose firm mouth and implacable dark eyes made her feel that he, and he alone, held the key to the situation. That he had realized young Frank's need and had filled it, albeit in secret, gave her to believe that he would also furnish such good reason for yielding to young Frank's boyish yearning as would make Mrs. Frank retire in disorder from any contest of clashing wills.

But when the old gentleman stepped into the room that night he did not carry the little dog under his arm; what he had was something bulkier. He stopped beside the basket which had been sent to Miss Beaver and which she had not yet opened. He leaned down and released the lid. A little fox-terrier jumped out and stood, one small paw upheld, its head cocked to one side.

Miss Beaver drew in a quick gasping breath of admiring amazement at what she realized was the doctor's unusual prescription. If only old Mr. Wiley would stand by, to uphold it, she felt that the boy would recover. She drew his attention with a gesture.

"See how nicely our patient's coming along, Mr. Wiley," she whispered. "Oh, please, won't you make them let him keep the little dog Doctor Parris sent him? You can. I know you can."

OLD Mr. Wiley leaned over the bed, apparently taking pleased note of the faint color on the boy's cheeks. He smiled with obvious satisfaction. He lifted his head, met Miss Beaver's pleading eyes, and nodded emphatically. Then he slackened his hold on whatever he had tucked under one arm and deposited it at the foot of the bed, meeting Miss Beaver's questioning eyes with a significant narrowing of his own. She looked at the thing, then up at him, puzzled. What he had brought in was one of those huge, plush-covered atrocities with tall ivory letters on the front that proclaimed it to be a Family Album. She surmised that this must be the album which the doctor had said she should look over to note how closely the small boy in the bed resembled his ancestors.

With a light gesture old Mr. Wiley relegated the album to the background, his glance seeking the fox-terrier that still hesitated in the middle of the room. Miss Beaver understood. She gently wakened the small patient, who sat up rubbing sleepy eyes expectantly. The dog, sensing a playmate, bounded upon the bed and began lapping at Frank's eager fingers with small whimperings.

"He loves me. Don't you, Spot? Look, nurse. He has black spots over his eyes, bigger than I remembered them. And he seems littler tonight, doesn't he? But he knows me. Gee, I wish I could keep him all the time."

Old Mr. Wiley sat silently in a comfortable chair at the shadowy back of the room as he had done on his previous visits but his severe old features softened as he watched the happy child and the antics of the little dog. When at last Frank's eyes grew humid and heavy with sleep, and he began to slip down on his pillow, he clung to his canine playmate, refusing to relinquish the puppy which had cuddled cosily against him.

Old Mr. Wiley's heavy brows lifted into a straight line over his high nose. A grimly ironical smile drew up the corners of his mouth. He made a gesture of resignation. His humorously twinkling eyes met the consternation in Miss Beaver's but he appeared pleased and unmoved at the prospect of the dog's remaining with the boy. He rose from his comfortable chair, drew a deep breath, again touched the admonitory finger to his lips and withdrew, still smiling. The door closed quietly behind his stately blue-clad figure.

Miss Beaver told herself agitatedly that he had no business to throw the onus of the whole situation onto her shoulders; but even while she resented this high-handed behavior she was inwardly aware with one of her strong intuitions that old Mr. Wiley knew indubitably what he was about, and that at the psychological moment he would justify her in permitting the dog to remain with young Frank.

She was in no hurry the following morning to turn over her patient to the day nurse and lingered on in the hope that Doctor Parris would appear early enough to get the dog away, as he had half hinted. That he would do his best to make the prescription stick she saw immediately after he took a single look at young Frank who sat up nimbly, his color normal for the first time in weeks. The suppressed excitement in the atmosphere Doctor Parris could hardly be expected to understand until the boy drew back the covers to show the inquisitive black nose and beady eyes hidden beneath.

"Gee, Doctor Parris, isn't he just the cutest dog you ever saw?" chuckled young Frank. "Oh, gosh, here *she* comes!"

The cover was whipped over the dog, whose whimpers subsided with uncommonly good sense. Perhaps young Mrs. Wiley might not have felt the puppy's presence but Kiki's sharp nose was not so easily put upon. Kiki, with a shrill bark, scrambled from her arms and leaped upon the bed where he began scratching furiously at the cover which Frank was holding desperately but vainly against this unexpected onslaught.

"What on earth . . ." began his mother, her eyes going from Kiki to Miss Beaver's harried expression. "Oh! A nasty little dog right in Francis's bed! Francis, push it out! It's probably full of fleas. How did that nasty little mongrel get in here?"

"This pup isn't a mongrel, Mrs. Wiley," snapped the doctor. "Anyone can see with half an eye it's a pedigreed animal."

She disregarded him. "Frank! Come here! Nurse, you should have known better than to allow that horrid little mutt . . ."

Frank Wiley III almost ran into the room, obviously distressed over something quite different from his wife's trouble.

"Somebody has meddled with one of our family portraits," he cried with obvious agitation. "It's been damaged . . ."

"Oh, bother the family portraits!" shrilled his wife, highly exasperated. "Look at the nasty common dog this nurse has let Francis have right in his bed! I never heard of such nerve! Call Mason! Have him put this dog out immediately!"

"I'll take the dog, if it's to be put out,"

growled Doctor Parris. "I know a good dog when I see one," he muttered resentfully.

"Let *me* see that dog!" exclaimed Frank Wiley III in a strangely grave voice. He pushed the frantically excited Kiki from the bed to the floor. He drew back the cover from the little dog huddled apprehensively against young Frank's thin body. "Oh, good Lord! It's incredible! It just isn't possible!"

"Isn't it?" snapped his wife, looking with distastefully wrinkled nose at her husband's chalky face, wide staring eyes. "Well, here it is and out it goes. Ring for Mason, Frank, at once. I want this dirty little mongrel out!"

WITHOUT paying the slightest attention, her husband turned to Miss Beaver. As he did so, his staring eyes fell upon the ornate plush album on the foot of the bed.

"How did that get here?" he demanded.

"Old Mr. Wiley brought it last night," admitted Miss Beaver, who was feeling a trifle indignant at the old gentleman's defection.

"Old Mr. Wiley?" echoed Doctor Parris; stupidly, for him, Miss Beaver thought. "*Old Mr. Wiley*?"

Frank Wiley III, his voice shaky, almost shouted at her.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me that old Mr. Wiley was here and brought that album?"

"I may as well tell you now as ever," snapped Miss Beaver and deliberately turned her back upon Mrs. Frank, addressing herself pointedly to Doctor Parris and the boy's father. "The old gentleman has been in here every night to see Frank since I've been on duty and he brought his little dog, and in my opinion his little dog should get the credit of any improvement in the patient's condition."

Frank Wiley III picked up the bulky volume and began turning the thick cardboard pages. His hands trembled; his face was queerly pasty.

"Turn the pages yourself, nurse, will you? See if you can find old Mr. Wiley's picture."

Miss Beaver flipped the cardboard pages one after another until a familiar face looked quizzically at her from a faded old daguerrotype. She put on finger triumphantly on it.

"Here he is. This is old Mr. Wiley."

Mrs. Frank tiptoed nearer, took a single look, then with a shrill scream fainted into Doctor Parris's convenient arms.

He muttered under his breath: "Superstitious damsel, this." Of Miss Beaver he asked drily as he deposited his fair burden distastefully in the big chair where the old gentleman had been sitting on his nightly visits: "My dear Miss Beaver, are you *very* certain old Mr. Wiley has been dropping in of nights?"

"Of course I am," declared Miss Beaver indignantly. "Is it so astonishing that I recognize a face I've been seeing now for three consecutive nights?"

"This *is* unbelievable," Frank Wiley III gasped.

Said the doctor gravely: "I ask you to be so very certain, nurse, because the original of that picture has been dead for over fifteen years."

As those astonishing words fell on Miss Beaver's ears, she turned from the doctor in sheer resentment.

"I don't care for practical jokes," said she with dignity to the boy's apparently stupefied father, "and I must say I resent being made sport of. I tell you plainly that old Mr. Wiley, the man in this picture," and she tapped her finger impressively on the album page, "has spent a couple of hours with Frankie and me every night since I've been on duty here, and that's *that*!"

"Then that's settled," exclaimed the boy's father in a loud and determined voice. "The dog stays."

As if miraculously restored, Mrs. Frank sprang to her feet.

"Is that *so*? Well, my dear husband, I'm afraid you're sadly mistaken. The dog goes!" She gave her husband glare for glare, the rouge standing in two round spots on her white face.

His look was one of active dislike. "We'll see about that, Florry. All of you, come out into the hall. I want you to see

something. Then let anyone say Frank can't keep that dog!"

He beckoned imperatively and they followed down the great staircase into the great hall below, where he stopped under a gilt-framed oil portrait, life size. His finger pointed significantly.

MISS BEAVER deciphered the small label at the front of the massive frame. The painting was a portrait of Frank Wiley I, the founder of the Wiley family. Her eyes rose higher to really look at the picture for the first time since she had been in the house. It was the living likeness of old Mr. Wiley and it almost seemed to her that, as she stared, one of his eyelids quivered slightly as if in recognition of her belated admiration for his diplomatic procedure. Beside him on the painted table one of his fine hands lay negligently or rather, seemed to be lying higher than the table proper, resting on . . . was it just bare canvas?

"Look for yourself, Florry! Where is the fox-terrier that was painted sitting on the table under Grandfather's hand?"

Young Mrs. Wiley stared pallidly at the likeness of the founder of the Wiley clan. "White paint," she conjectured. Then, peering closer at the canvas: "Somebody's scraped off the paint where the dog used to be."

Stiff and grim, his own man now, her husband faced her.

"Does my boy keep that dog?"

Behind them sounded a low exclamation. At the head of the staircase stood young Frank, the puppy tucked securely under one arm.

"Nobody's going to take away my little dog that Great-grandfather Wiley brought me," cried the lad stoutly, black eyes flashing, thin face determined and unyielding.

"Don't let that dog come near me!" screamed Mrs. Frank and went into a genuine attack of hysteria. "He isn't *real!*"

Doctor Parris exchanged a look with Miss Beaver, whose face was pale but contented.

"I always knew you were psychic," he whispered, brows drawn into a puzzled scowl. "That's how the old gentleman, God rest his wilful soul, could get through."

"I wondered that he never spoke a single word! Now that it's over, I think I'm going to faint," decided Miss Beaver shakily.

"Nonsense," snapped the doctor with scant courtesy. "But *she* is well scared, thank God. I hardly think she will interfere much in future with young Frank. And by the looks of him, the boy's father has had his backbone stiffened considerably."

"That painted dog?" whispered Miss Beaver's tremulous lips.

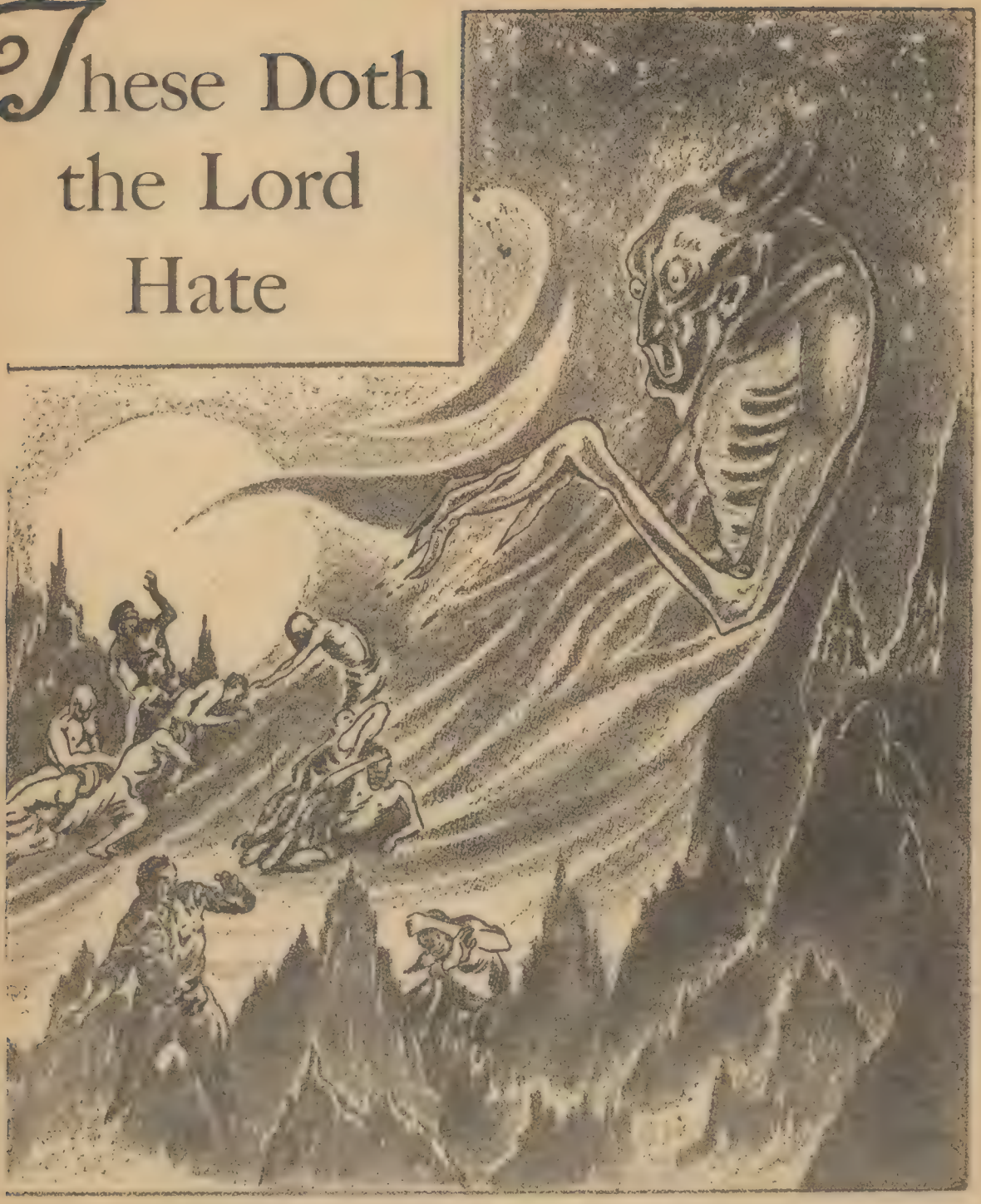
"Eh? Yes. Ah, yes, the dog," murmured the doctor, too casually.

"You—you—dared!" uttered Miss Beaver incoherently under her breath.

"Not altogether," he protested against her ear.

He pointed upward. Miss Beaver's eyes followed that gesture and met the admonitory, inscrutable, but very gratified pictured eyes of old Mr. Wiley.

# These Doth the Lord Hate



**BY GANS T. FIELD**
(MANLY WADE WELLMAN)

BEFORE me lies open E. A. Ashwin's translation of *Compendium Maleficarum,* just as three hundred years ago the original lay open before judges and preachers, a notable source of warning against, and indictment of, witchcraft. And from its pages have risen three folk long dead.

*A weird fragment from the Dark Ages*

The magic that gives them life is that of imagination, concerning which power Brother Francesco-Maria Guazzo writes with sober learning in the very first chapter of the *Compendium*. Their simple embalming was a lone paragraph, barely a hundred and fifty words in length—one of Guazzo's "various and ample examples, with the sole purpose that men, considering the cunning of witches, might study to live piously and devoutly in the Lord."

GUAZZO has written shortly and with reserve, though never dryly; and in 1608, when the *Compendium* was first printed under patronage of Cardinal Orazio Maffei, his style was adequate. James I of England still shuddered over the memory of Dr. Fian's conspiracy with Satan to destroy him. In Bredbur, near Cologne, lived a dozen or more aging men who horrifiedly had seen a captured wolf turn back into their neighbor, the damnable Peter Stumpf. Gilles Grenier, prisoned in a Franciscan friary at Bordeaux, would cheerfully tell any visitor his adventures as a devil-gifted warlock, shape-shifter and cannibal. But times and beliefs have changed. Since Guazzo himself foresaw that his book might provoke "the idle jests of the censorious," let his shade not vex me if I embroider his brief, plain citation.

The phenomenon occurred near Treves, upon the goodly river Moselle, immediately east of the present Franco-German border. Some know Treves, ancient and pleasant, with the cathedral where is preserved a coat of Jesus Christ to call forth the world's wonder and worship. Around the town, now as in Guazzo's time, are pleasant fields and gardens. The scene we are to consider, though unfolding upon land properly German, is more than a trifle French.

*In the district of Treves,* writes Guazzo and translates Ashwin, *a peasant was planting cabbages with his eight-year-old daughter. . . .*

Frenchmen hold cabbages in notable esteem and affection—a favorite love-name, throughout the provinces and environs of France, is "cabbage." Without good store of this vegetable, no Moselle farm would be perfect, and certainly no Moselle stew. The peasant was planting, and so it was spring, a fair day with the sky clear and bright, as we shall observe. Our man of the soil comes readily to life before us, stooping and delving at the fresh, good-smelling furrow. He seems a sturdy fellow, sharp-featured like a Gaul, blond-bearded like a Teuton. His widely spread feet are encased in wooden shoes, he wears a loose, drab frock and a shapeless cap. For all the distance of years, he is amazingly like a peasant cabbage-grower of today.

And beside him, as we have read, works his daughter. Eight years old—is that not young to be a gardener? Yet she is vigorous and intelligent and willing beyond her years. The trowel and seedbag seem to do their own duty in her small, quick hands. Her father is deeply impressed. He, continues the commentator: . . . *praised the girl highly for the work. The young maid, whose sex and age combined to make her talkative, boasted that she could do more wonderful things than that; and when her father asked what they were. . . .*

It is well worth another full stop to consider that complete picture—one of rustic endeavor, not too heavy or too distasteful, especially when the gardeners are so bound together in mutual understanding and affection. Seed-sowers of today can understand Father's pride in his industrious daughter. "How well you dig, my little cabbage!" And his eyes crinkle up in his good-natured brown face as he enjoys his own play upon words. He doubts honestly if there was ever such a good child. She is a true daughter of her mother, and here he turns to glance over his shoulder at the house above the garden—small but snug and well repaired, with an ample gush of smoke from the chimney hole.

His wife is evidently concocting the noonday meal. Something more than bread and soup, he warrants—he is mystified at the plenty of good things she provides, as if she got it by enchantment.

I WILL grant that the picture is too bright too cheerful; were it fiction, we might borrow from Edgar Allan Poe the device of

a black cloud dimming the sky. But perhaps the contrast will be the greater with things as they are.

The excellent child finds the more savor in Father's commendation because she knows that well she deserves it. Nor is she backward in telling him that planting cabbages is not her lone virtue and study. Other of her talents may please as well as benefit him.

Again Guazzo: . . . *she said, "Go away a little, and I will quickly make it rain on whatever part of the garden you wish."*

And Father? It takes no further effort of the mind's eye to see that peasant visage broaden and the beard stir in a great grin. This daughter of his never fails to warm his heart. Surely she must have heard him say that rain would be welcome in this planting season. As she grows older, she will hear from the priest that only God almighty can send rain. But her pretense is innocent—today let her have her fun, play a game to make them both laugh. Guazzo calls the good man astonished, but more probably he achieves an elaborate burlesque of surprises as he says: *"Come, then, I will go a little away."*

Jovially he tramps off, fifty paces or so, taking care not to tread on the freshly seeded cabbage-rows. He and his daughter have gone far head of their intentions this morning; there can be a minute or two of rest and sport. He pauses and turns.

Now, for the first time, perhaps he scowls.

The child has caught up a gnarled stick and is beating up a froth of mud in a shallow trench. She is speaking, too, or saying a litany. He can catch only the rhythmic sound of her voice, no words.

. . . *and behold there fell from the clouds a sudden rain upon the said place.*

"From the clouds"—whence came those clouds so suddenly? And now this deluge; from his point apart, the cabbage-farmer stares. His shoulders hunch in his loose smock, as though they supported a sudden heavy weight. His sabots dig into the earth. One square-fingered hand steals upward to sign the cross upon his thick chest.

And over yonder falls a rain such as no Christian cares to see, heavy and narrow. It is a shimmery, drenching column of down-darting water, no thicker than a round tower of the baron's castle at Treves, but tall as infinity. He can hear it, too, a drumming rattle on the thirsty clods, like the patterned dance-gambols of so many light impious hoofs.

HE CROSSED himself again, and the rain is over, as abruptly and completely as it began. Now is the time for him to inquire in his heart if indeed he saw and heard rightly.

He knows that he did. The rain is gone, but there remains a circular patch of earth all churned to mud; and here comes trotting his daughter, smiling and triumphant, and her garments are drenched. Her eyes sparkle; so sparkled the eyes of her mother, no later than last Sunday, when a roast of pig came to the rough table, as if from nowhere. The hungry husband did not ask about it then; now the question burns him—whence came that meat?

All this detail is romance, a careless padding of Guazzo's narrative, which is much shorter and balder:

*The astounded father asked: "Who taught you to do this?" She answered: "My mother did; and she is very clever at this and other things like it."*

We may assure ourselves that there will be no more cabbage-planting this day. The peasant nods dumbly, and plucks at the hem of his smock. Then he clears his throat and says that the sun is high, and that the midday meal is undoubtedly ready.

Together they go to the hut above the garden—the man's sabots thudding heavily and lifelessly, the child's bare feet skipping and dancing. A hearty, rose-cheeked woman greets them loudly at the door. To be sure, dinner is ready; but he who suggested a stoppage of work to eat, he finds himself unable to swallow a crumb.

Finally he rises, lurches rather than walks from the door. Nearby is a secluded spot; we can readily visualize it as a clump of bushy young trees beside a narrow creek. Into that hiding plunges the peasant. Screened by the trunks and branches, he sinks wretchedly to

his knees. He feels that this is not enough of humility. His face droops, his shoulders go slack, and a moment later he lies prostrate upon the shadowed mold of last year's leaves.

There he prays, for an hour and an hour. Sometimes he finds words to say, oftener he achieves only moans and unaccustomed tears.

Can he not be forgiven for having merciful doubts as to his duty in this case? Even the Savior once pleaded that a bitter cup be withheld from His lips. But the peasant makes shift to rise at last. His face is set as firmly as the carven granite of a saint on the cathedral's doorway, yonder in Treves. True, his hands tremble a little, as Abraham's hands must have trembled as they lifted to sacrifice Isaac at God's command; but the final answer has come into his heart, and he knows what to do.

Here is that answer, as Guazzo gives it:

*The peasant nobly faced his right and plain duty; so a few days later, on the pretense that he had been invited to a wedding, he took his wife and daughter dressed in festal wedding robes to the neighboring town, where he handed them over to the Judge to be punished for the crime of witchcraft.*

It is hard to imagine how the man lived during those intervening "few days." It is impossible to divine what were his arts and powers that he kept a smiling face and calm manner while his heart smoldered like a coal from the smithy.

And the plan of betrayal, that was a shrewd one and worthy of the greatest witchfinder, let alone a peasant. Yet I doubt if he congratulated himself upon it.

They go to the fair town of Treves, all three in holiday gear. Sometimes, on that journey, the little rain-maker must have been weary, and rode perforce on Father's shoulder. Was his arm tighter than usual around her little body?

Did his voice quiver as he answered some question she prattled? I make no doubt of that; but from Guazzo we know what the end of the jaunt turned out to be.

Of a sudden the mother and daughter are in the hands of the judge, under guard of his men-at-arms.

With what fierce scorn does the witch-woman deny the charges—until, after hours of questioning and perhaps a touch of the lash or thumbscrew, she makes confession. True, she is a sorceress. She has signed the Devil's book, attended the Sabbat, sworn the oath of evil. She has schooled her daughter to the like infamy.

LOOK elsewhere in Guazzo's absorbing *Compendium* for what must have been the rest of the story. Death by fire, he says confidently, is the only right punishment for the dreadful sin of witchcraft. A stake, therefore, is set upright in the market-place of Treves, and heaped about with faggots. To this the witch and her fledgling are borne, high upon the armored shoulders of the law's servants. With the last of her tears, the older culprit pleads and prays that she be allowed to walk. Sternly the judge refuses this request; is it not a commonplace that a witch, going to execution, need but touch toe to earth for her bonds to dissolve and her executioners to fall as if struck by lightning?

That double witch-burning is a rare treat and curiosity in Treves, and it receives the attention it merits. Not a soul in all the district, from the baron of the castle to the beggars whose home and heritage is the gutter, but must draw near to see.

No, that is not strictly true. Not every soul in the district is present at the burning; for a solitary man trudges away, to his empty home by the cabbage garden. His big hands are locked behind him, his chin weighs like lead upon his breast, the lines of his face teem with tears. He dares to utter the supplication refused by the priest at the cathedral—a timid prayer that two spirits even now taking flight, shall not be utterly consumed in hell; O Lord, let them win at last through long punishment and sincere repentance to some measure of comfort in a most humble corner of heaven.

Not all agonies are of the fire.

# RAPPORT

By
Mary Elizabeth Counselman

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Marco the Mentalist was seated before his dressing-room mirror, cold-creaming the grease paint from his long bony face, when the note was delivered. He glanced at it, idly at first——for he was always receiving mash-notes from some fluttery female in his audience, fascinated by him because he had "read her mind" during his usual three-a-day performance. Nor was he bad-looking; glancing back at his reflection in the mirror, he frowned slightly, aware of a pouchy dissipated sag beneath his eyes and under his chin. Not that fourty-eight was too old for a stage and night-club mentalist with the arrogant good-looks of a fallen Lucifer——but it wasn't young, either. Another five years, of this, eating hurriedly in one-arm joints across from the theatre, moving from one town to another as his novelty in the present locality began to wane. . . .

His thoughts broke off sharply as his . . . . . .

piercing black eyes focused again on the note. *Elias Rutherford,* it was signed. A man, not a woman; and from the cramped old-fashioned handwriting, a rather elderly man. Marco, still rubbing cold cream into his face, read the first few lines more carefully—and sat up straight.

*Dear Sir:* (the note said formally, with a slight tone of amused condescension).

*I attended your last performance tonight, and have decided that you are either a great psychic—or a very great fraud. I am a wealthy man, but not a happy one—the latter state due largely to the loss of my wife and our unborn child several years ago. If I had then believed in the power of one human mind to transmit thought to another, my wife and baby might now be alive. . . . But I did not then, and do not now, believe in such a psychic phenomenon beyond the realm of mere coincidence. However, I am willing to accept proof of anything that modern science has not as yet disproved. The possibility haunts me.*

*If you can give me indisputable proof that a normal human being of your choice can transmit or receive thoughts, from me or from some person of my choosing, I will give you my personal check for $20,000. Will you call at the above address tomorrow at ten, if you elect to accept this challenge? If you decline, I shall assume that you are an ordinary stage-trickster, honest enough to admit it. If you try to fool me, however, I shall feel obligated to expose you to the press, and to the American Society for Psychic Research whose genuine efforts to separate the true from the false are not fully appreciated by the layman.*

*Sincerely, your servant,*
*Elias Rutherford*

Marco sucked in a long breath, his eyes narrowing as they lingered on that *$20,000.* Some old crackpot, he mused. Lonely and bored, brooding over the death of his wife —which, obviously, he half-believed he had "sensed" in time to warn her. He was always running into people like that; Marco laughed shortly. Naive, wide-eyed innocents with long-winded tales of a "dream" they had had of some relative at the very moment of his death. One would think they could recognize a coincidence for what it was—but, no! People worried about their loved ones dying a hundred times a day, but when it finally happened, and happened the very way they feared it was going to, nobody could convince them that they had not experienced a moment of "clairvoyance" or "telepathy."

This Rutherford, Marco decided with a wry smile, was just such a fool; perhaps a bit more intelligent than the average, but nagged by regret that he had not given the idea more thought. It might be easy to convince him of something he wanted to believe, anyhow, the mentalist told himself, narrow-eyed. Just another rich old codger who had more of the worldly goods than he deserved— Marco scowled bitterly. Fat soft capitalist. . . ! Probably never had worked a day in his life. Never sweated to warm up a cold audience! Never lived on hamburgers between bookings, or slept in a railroad station because he didn't have the price of a hotel room. . . !

THE mentalist stood up, mouth twitching slightly like that of a hungry cat stalking an unsuspecting bird on the garden walk. With swift hands that trembled a little in their eagerness, he wiped the cream from his face and strode out into the night-shrouded city. A way of collecting that $20,000 had just occurred to him—a hole-proof way of proving that "telepathy" is a scientific fact, if one first puts the cart before the horse!

Hurrying down the dark street to the little hotel where he was staying this week, Marco stopped by a little bookshop, open all night for the convenience of late-abeds like himself. For some time he browsed about, then slipped a small volume under his coat. Paying for a second book, which he tossed into a trashcan on his way, the mentalist almost ran the rest of the way to his hotel, and locked himself in. There, assured of a complete privacy, he opened the book he had bought: a treatise on medical hypnotism and suggestion.

He read all night, committing much of

the book to memory. And when, as the dingy light of dawn seeped in through his window, he drifted off to sleep, Marco was smiling. . . .

Promptly at ten o'clock, the great brass knocker on Elias Rutherford's front door boomed hollow notice of his arrival. Marco, in the only good suit he had, was ushered into a great paneled study, furnished in deep red leather. A fire was burning in the ornate fireplace, and a shriveled little man, with the cold gray eyes of a fish and a nose and pointed chin that almost met, was poking at the blazing logs peevishly.

As Marco entered, he turned and regarded him with the shrewdest expression the mentalist had ever encountered. He fidgetted, trying to smile and look at ease as the old man waved him to one of the deep chairs. But when, moments later, Elias Rutherford was still staring at him without uttering a word, Marco began to wish he had not come.

This, he realized abruptly, was not going to be an easy customer to fool. He swallowed twice, then in a matter-of-fact tone, began the spiel he had decided upon as a build-up. He had gone to some trouble to look up theories on telepathy, in order to sound convincing.

"Mr. Rutherford . . . May I trouble you for a pack of cards? A new pack, if possible. I am not," he smiled, "going to show you any magic tricks, believe me. I should merely like to give you the ESP test perfected by Dr. Rhine of Duke University. . . . You are familiar with it, perhaps? Cards are turned by one person, while another tries to receive the impression of their color or number. Thirty-seven right out of 52 tries is so far beyond mathematical chance as to indicate extra-sensory perception. . . ."

The old man nodded, to his dismay. With a shrug, he produced a sealed pack of cards from a small buhl cabinet and handed them to the mentalist with a manner as matter-of-fact as Marco's own.

"Oh, yes," Rutherford grunted. "Rhine. Dr. P. K. McCowan, of Dumfries. And Dunne, the English philosopher. I've studied all their pet theories. But, Mr. Marco, I may as well tell you that I have subjected myself to every known ESP test. Ever since . . . since my wife, Nadja . . ." The old man's voice broke slightly, betraying the grief that seemed as poignant now as on that day years ago. "I . . . She was in a department store, buying me a small present for my birthday. She . . . she entered a self-service elevator—at precisely 3:15, I later learned. I was at home with a slight cold, dozing by the fire here in this same chair.

"Suddenly I . . . I began dreaming that I saw her walk through a small sliding door. There was a sign hanging on that door, a sign Nadja could not read because she was Polish and knew very little English. But . . . I am sure she sent me an *impression* of that sign, puzzled by it and by the fact that nobody else seemed to be using the elevator. . . .

"*She* took it, however." The old man brought out the words harshly. "And it fell five stories with her the moment she pressed the release button. The sign, of course, said: 'OUT OF ORDER, TAKE STAIRS.' Tell me," he broke off, fixing Marco with his cold eyes, "is it possible that my wife could read a sign without knowing what it said, and yet project its meaning to someone who could—to me? I . . . I *saw* that sign, you see. Let's say I *dreamed* I saw it, and I could have phoned the store in time to warn her not to take that elevator . . . *Or could I?*" Rutherford smiled drily. "That, Mr. Marco, is what I am willing to pay $20,000 to find out! The balance of my estate will then be bequeathed to the American Society for Psychic Research—to find out *how* and *why* the transmission of thought is possible, and perhaps save others from the tragedy that I might have averted."

MARCO suppressed a smile. Then the old hellion *was* suggestible! He already half-believed in, or wanted to believe in, something that his logic told him could not be so. Also, he was obsessed with that "acid test" which, at some later date, he planned to give this charlatan who claimed to be able to broadcast and receive "thought-waves." Like a walkie-talkie set. (Which, actually, was the gimmick Marco and his

pretty blonde assistant used, to "transmit thoughts" from aisle to stage.) The rest of it was done with a clever system of signals: "*And guess what? Guess. . . ?*" The answer was: *A gold watch, girl's.* Then Marco, still blindfolded, "read minds" from the stage as his assistant picked up the written questions handed her by those who had "problems." She held them to her forehead, then read them aloud in a whisper to some third person seated in the audience, who then dramatically was allowed to tear up the paper. Up on the stage, Marco, hearing it read through walkie-talkie earphones set into his phony black-velvet blindfold, then answered the question, much to the mystification of all concerned.

He grinned now, eyeing Elias Rutherford warily. If he could fool a whole audience for cakes-and-coffee money, surely he could trick this senile old codger into believing that he, Marco, was possessed of a sixth sense! It all hinged on the old magician's trick of misdirection.

Smiling, more at ease now, he settled back in the deep chair and put his fingertips together in a pedantic manner calculated to impress even the most scientific-minded.

"Really, sir," Marco went into the act he had planned last night in his shabby hotel room, "there is nothing supernatural about telepathy and clairvoyance. We know that sounds and pictures can be transmitted by means of electrical waves broadcast by man-made machinery . . . yet we are unwilling to credit this same power to that most intricate of all machines, the human mind."

MARCO'S voice, casually, had sunk to a monotone. His piercing eyes were fixed on Rutherford's, holding them—while between his fingers he swung a small silver pencil. Back and forth it swung, back and forth, until the old man's eyes were impelled to follow its rhythmic motion. Intent on Marco's learned discourse, he did not seem to be aware of what the stage-trickster was trying to do. . . .

". . . a radio, a human radio, that's what the mind is," the mentalist droned on. "It is simply a matter of finding someone whose mind operates on the same frequency as one's own; the same wave-length, let us say. Many of us think in *words,* and can therefore transmit our thoughts only in words, or groups of syllables, or letters. Only another such mind could, therefore, be expected to receive its telepathic message. Other minds project *pictures,* rather than words; let us say, a television broadcast, to be picked up only by similarly trained minds. . . ."

*Back and forth,* the silver pencil swung. *Back, forth, back, forth. . . .* Old Mr. Rutherford blinked at it drowsily—and Marco suppressed a grin of triumph. But his soothing voice did not alter its monotone:

". . . very simple, if we could only grasp the principle as we now understand the principle of radio-reception and transmission. We have at least invented a machine for measuring the wave-impulses of the mind; I refer to the encephalograph, used in tests for epilepsy and certain other types of insanity. Why is not such a machine used to experiment with psychic, as well as medical, phenomena of the mind? It well may be, and in the very near future! Insanity itself used to be considered a supernatural thing. A man was 'possessed of devils' when the electrical process called *thought* went awry. . . . Do you hear me, Mr. Rutherford?" Marco threw in softly. "Do-you-hear-me. . . ?"

The old man swayed slightly, eyes fixed glassily now on that swinging pencil. He nodded with the mechanical obedience of a marionette.

"I . . . hear . . . you. . . ."

Marco leaned forward, fixing the glazed eyes of the old man with his own compelling gaze.

"Repeat after me," he commanded softly. "Repeat: 'Tom, Tom, the piper's son . . . Stole a pig and away he run'. . . ."

"Tom . . . Tom . . . the piper's . . ." Elias Rutherford, in a dull voice like a sleepwalker, repeated the nursery rhyme.

"Now!" Marco said quietly. "You will remember that—do you understand? Remember those words! They are the words you will use in the test, when you send them as a telepathic message to me. Understand?"

"I . . . understand . . ." Rutherford droned.

"Tomorrow night, at nine!" Marco commanded.

"At . . . nine . . ." the old man repeated, like an obedient child.

Then Marco made a small sharp sound, by snapping his fingers. The other blinked and started, rubbing his eyes. The mentalist smiled.

"Am I boring you?" he asked politely, as though nothing had occurred to break the trend of his conversation. "I mean, about the mind being a radio. It is quite possible that our minds are in tune—or *en rapport,* as the French say, Mr. Rutherford. If it so happens that my thinking-apparatus operates on the same frequency as yours, I am confident that you could send me a thought-message . . . oh, tomorrow night, let's say. At eight. . . ?" Marco suggested slyly.

"At nine," said the old man firmly, with a slight frown of puzzlement as he said it. "I . . . feel, for some reason, that it should be at nine."

"As you wish," Marco agreed smoothly —trying not let a gleam of triumph in his eyes betray that his plan had worked.

Elias Rutherford had been hypnotized, neatly and completely. He had been given a post-hypnotic suggestion, which he would follow now without ever understanding why he did so.

TOMORROW night, promptly at nine, the old man would "project" that nursery rhyme as his test-message, believing it to have originated in his own head—not that of the receiver! And $20,000 would change hands—because old Rutherford could not help but be impressed by this startling proof of mental telegraphy. There might even be, Marco considered with a half-smile, ways to get the millionaire to bequeath *him* the balance of his estate, rather than some idiotic Society for Psychic Research! Crackpots! Seekers after sensation and bizarre amusement. These metaphysical groups went all-out to kid themselves, the mentalist thought wryly; but he himself, for all that he made his living with the so-called "black arts," was a materialist.

"Very well," he agreed now pleasantly, as though humoring Elias Rutherford in some whim, "nine it shall be. But . . . for your own sake, and for mine, sir, I must ask that you enforce certain test-conditions while the experiment is going on. Remember," his dark eyes twinkled, "I am a professional magician. There might be ways, other than through telepathy, that I could get hold of your message."

The millionaire smiled coldly. "I thought of that," he said drily. "There are many tricksters in the field. Oh, I know all about these table-tapping devices and cheese-cloth ectoplasm, used by professional mediums! And I have read that the great Houdini himself had a standing offer of one thousand dollars to anyone who could produce psychic phenomena which he could not duplicate by scientific means. You may consider me the same sort of hard-boiled skeptic!"

"Splendid!" Marco said smoothly. "I was hoping you would take that very attitude, sir. How shall we work it, then? In separate rooms? And under guard?"

"In separate rooms . . . across town," Rutherford snapped. "I will remain here in this library, with someone you can trust. A member of the police?" he suggested slyly, his keen old eyes fixed on Marco's bland countenance. "You would not object—since you say there is to be no question of fraud?"

Marco's expression did not waver. He bowed graciously, accustomed to eyes that were critical and observant of his every facial tremor.

"As you wish," he agreed. "And I shall be confined to, say, my own hotel room across town? I am not a wealthy man," he gestured apologetically. "It is a very small, dingy hotel—with no fire-escape at the single window of my fifth-story room. You may station a police guard outside the door, if you like, and tie or handcuff me to my bed. The phone will be in the hall, so there is no question of my conferring with any accomplice who might get hold of your message. But I must request that you write it down on a piece of paper, at the hour we agreed upon. Write it, reread it to yourself, concentrate on the word-picture it presents.

That way, perhaps I can receive your message in letters, words, or pictures—whichever type of thought-projection is most suitable as a means of communication between your mind and mine."

Rutherford chuckled, eyeing the mentalist with, almost, a grudging respect—the respect of one hard-headed realist for another of the same caliber.

"You certainly have your . . . your patter down to perfection!" he commented, amused. "One would think we were planning an actual scientific test in, say, wireless communication!"

"Perhaps we are," Marco answered him simply. "Perhaps we are, Mr. Rutherford. . . . Tomorrow night, then. At nine. I shall expect your . . . ah . . . friends from the police at my hotel promptly, a short time before that hour. I suggest, too, that you seal the doors and windows with paraffin, as an added precaution. They say," he drawled, "every man has a price—and how do you know your police guard could not be bribed?"

"I intend to pick one who can neither be bribed nor tricked!" the old man said. "You will not find me an easy man to hoodwink, sir! Not for $20,000," he chuckled good-humoredly, "which it took me a great many years of hard work to acquire!"

Marco laughed, and bowed himself through the door of the great paneled room. Outside on the street again, as he signaled for a passing cab, his face hardened. Damned old miser! Well, tomorrow night he would shake him loose from some of that "hard-earned" cash—$20,000 of it—as easily as one could take candy from a baby!

AT EIGHT-THIRTY the following night, Marco the Mentalist was absent from his usual nightly performance of standing, blindfolded, on a spot-lighted stage and reading "thought-messages" sent by those in his audience.

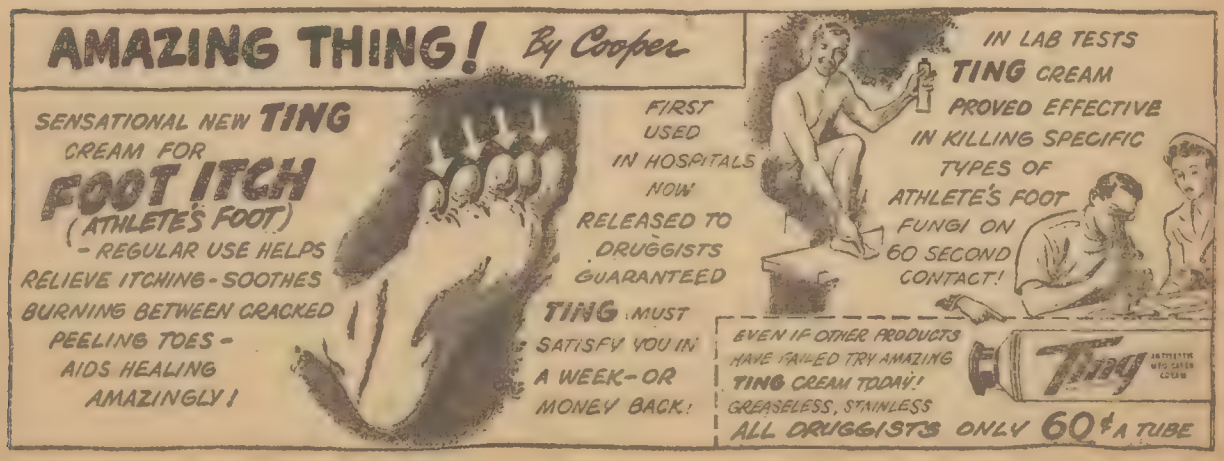
Instead, pleading sickness to the annoyed stage manager of his second-rate theatre, he waited in his room, heart pounding with excitement.

A knock on the door roused him. He opened it quickly, to find two plainclothesmen from the bunco squad standing there, grinning at him. One dangled a pair of handcuffs, whistling cheerfully, while the other went carefully over every inch of Marco's cheap little room, looking for mechanical devices such as a short-wave radio or wireless outfit.

The mentalist lounged against the cracked plaster wall while they searched, smoking lazily—and looking more than ever like a fallen Lucifer in his ornate dressing gown, with the smoke drifting up past his half-closed eyes and enigmatic smile.

One of the officers glanced at him. "What's this all about, Marco? The Chief sent us, but he didn't say what was the gimmick. Publicity stunt?"

Marco shrugged. "Something like that, Reilly. You'll know after it's over. Just be sure to seal me up in this room so even a termite couldn't get in. *And don't open the*



*door, whatever happens.* Not until ten o'clock. Understand? One hour."

"We got our orders," the detective grunted.

Some minutes later, Marco the Mentalist sat smiling on his unmade bed, with his wrists handcuffed to the iron head—alone with his thoughts. Or Elias Rutherford's, he mused, laughing silently.

The tiny room, with its now-sealed and locked door and window, had become stifling in the short time he had been waiting. Sweat beaded Marco's forehead and upper lip, but he leaned back patiently against the head of the bed, smoking and thinking.

Twenty grand! Just for sitting here, waiting for an old fool to "think" of a nursery rhyme his skillful hypnotism had already planted in his mind! The mentalist chuckled, dreaming of Monte Carlo, of the Riviera; of sleek blond women who would never give a second-rate vaudeville artist a second glance; of sunlight, and leisure, and long amusing hours that he could never have afforded, as a four-a-day entertainer. And it need never end!

Because, his thoughts leaped ahead eagerly, this need not be the only fraud he would perpetrate on some gullible, wealthy old coot! Why, he could establish a cult! The idle rich went for psychic nonsense, hook, line, and sinker. Telepathy! Why hadn't he thought of the hypnotic angle before? It was a natural, a lead-pipe cinch to pick from some idiot's mind a few words that had already been planted there!

The mentalist laughed softly, eyes half-closed as he lay on his bed, waiting and looking with amusement at that paraffin-sealed door behind which two minions of the law were waiting also. Thoughts! Nothing but thoughts—invisible, inaudible little electric waves, according to his spiel to Rutherford—could penetrate this fort of his own cleverness. Twenty thousand bucks! Twenty thousand. . . . Marco's eyes closed drowsily, dreaming of a ridiculous scene that was taking place in a big paneled library across town. An old man, earnestly scribbling a nonsense rhyme on a piece of paper. Concentrating on it, his withered lips moving, his will focused on the idea of projecting the words through space to . . .

MARCO stiffened, wrinkling his thin arched nose. He sat up painfully, spread-eagled against the bed-head by his handcuffed wrists. For, quite suddenly, to his horror, he had smelled something. . . .

*Smoke!*

With a sharp intake of breath he glanced down at the bedclothes and saw a tiny tongue of flame licking hungrily at the sheets, at his wool overcoat recently cleaned with . . . Gasoline! He smelled the fumes of it now, as the flame reached it and glazed higher where the coat lay carelessly flung across the bed at his feet. He tried to kick it off, struggling to reach it, with his wrists straining against their steel shackles. . . . But the movement only served to fan the blaze.

It leaped higher, ate deeper, finding sudden food in the cotton mattress. Marco coughed and cried out hoarsely, drawing up his feet.

"Help!" he yelled. "Hey! You cops out there—my bed's on fire! Get me out of here. . . !"

For answer, the two plainclothesmen in the hall outside laughed lightly.

"No kiddin'?" one of them drawled.

"Yeah? The Chief said you might try to pull something like that," the other jeered. "No dice, Marco—we don't open this door till ten o'clock. And it's only nine-thirty-five. . . ."

"No, listen!" Marco shouted, half-laughing. "This is no gag; I set fire to the bed with my cigarette. Get me out of this. . . !"

Laughter. A few jesting catcalls from the men outside his door.

Marco's smile vanished. Sweat that was half from the mounting heat, half from horror at his predicament, popped out on his face and ran down his quivering mouth. The wicked little flames were ringing him in now, creeping toward his drawn-up feet. Smoke billowed from the charred bedclothes, stinging his eyes and nose so that he could hardly see. Coughing and gagging, straining at his handcuffs, Marco screamed.

*"Please! For God's sake! I'm not kid-*

*ding. . . ! I . . . I'm burning to death! I . . . can't breathe. . . !"*

Laughter, ribald and derisive. One of the men was even going away. Going downstairs for a drink; a cool bubbling drink. . . . Marco gagged, swallowing smoke. His throat was raw now, his eyes streaming. The tiny sealed room had filled to the ceiling with black, stifling clouds. And the mattress blazed, scorching his shoes now, singeing the hairs on his legs. Like a mocking red-and-yellow demon, the fire reached for him with graceful hands that blistered his face . . . that . . . that seared his staring eyes. . . !

*"Rutherford!"* he screamed, insanely. *"Rutherford—help me! I'm . . . burning! I'm . . . burning . . . Rutherford, help! Help. . . !"*

The fire reached, enfolding him in its red arms. Marco screamed, a long tearing sound of agony . . . through which, it seemed, somewhere, that he could hear a bell ringing. A phone. . . . A telephone bell . . . ringing and ringing, with frantic insistence. . . .

HE AWOKE, painfully, in a hospital bed; awoke to darkness, and the pungent smell of antiseptic, and the low murmur of a doctor's voice conferring with a nurse. There was, he dimly recognized, also another voice—an old man's treble, sharp and sour.

"Doctor, will he. . . - How much of the body surface was burned?"

"About a third. Oh, he'll live, I think. But . . . even with plastic surgery. . . . Well, he won't be a pretty sight."

"What a pity!" The nurse's voice. "He was . . . awfully good-looking. I . . . I saw his act on the stage last week. Wonderful, isn't he? I mean, golly, the way he just reads your mind. . . !"

AT HER thrilled tone, gullible and utterly mystified, Marco the Mentalist almost smiled through his agony and tried to stir. Why . . . why, he was a mass of bandages! What . . . where . . .? Who was the gauze-swaddled mummy?

He remembered, groaning. The hoax, the great hoax by which he was to have fleeced an old man of twenty thousand dollars. It was gone now. And . . . and his face; his arrogant good looks, his charm, his stage magnetism—all that was gone, too! Marco whimpered deep in his throat, cursing himself, cursing his own avarice.

And then:

"Wonderful?" old Rutherford's voice was murmuring, oddly, in answer to the young nurse. "Why . . . yes, my dear. I believe Marco was genuinely able to transmit and receive thought. I shall, of course, pay all his hospital expenses—since, in a way, his disfigurement is my fault. And he will receive my check for twenty thousand as agreed. Tell him that the moment he awakens, will you, Doctor? It . . . it might console him. And I owe it to him. A . . . sort of bet."

"Twenty thousand?" the nurse gasped. "He *won* it, Mr. Rutherford?"

"Yes. Marco proved that telepathy is possible . . . and practical, even under test-conditions," Elias Rutherford answered softly. "I . . . I am convinced, personally. And . . . I shall leave my fortune to the ASPR for further research into . . . what well may be a new branch of science, rather than a mere superstitious theory. Marco and I did send and receive a telepathic message," the old man mutttered. "Although . . . in reverse. I was transmitting to him a silly bit of nursery rhyme, which I intended using as a test-message . . . when all at once, very clearly, there came into mind a picture of Marco handcuffed to his bed, *surrounded by flames! I . . . I . . .* It was so vivid an impression that I could not restrain an impulse to phone his hotel—and thereby saved him from a horrible death. So, we did succeed in establishing . . . a *rapport.*"

Under the bandages Marco's burned face contorted. Muffled sounds came through the gauze that covered his blistered mouth.

He was laughing, wildly. . . .

# THE PRISM

## by MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

*Souls look different when you see them through rainbow glass.*

WRECKERS were tearing down the old Jemison mansion on "the Hill" when Jeddy found the prism. I want to tell you about it. Now! Because I . . . Well, I haven't got much time. The pain, you understand . . .

It was nothing in the world but a broken bangle off the big crystal chandelier that had

lighted the Jemisons' ballroom, back yonder when the old white-columned house was the center of Alabama's largest plantation, and music and laughter drifted out across the velvet lawns and formal gardens to the slave quarters in back. Jeddy had a right there; he was a kind of distant cousin, who used to work as a handyman and errand-boy for the family before they went broke and moved to Carolina. Besides, he was more of a help than a bother to the wrecking crew—bringing them water from the spring, holding their crowbars and hammers for them, or lifting some heavy piece of lumber; always with that eager vacuous grin that marked him for what he was. An imbecile, a harmless imbecile. A man with a child's mind. . . .

OR, ANYHOW, that was how everybody in Jemisonville regarded him. Especially after he started wandering around town, peeking at people through that little piece of broken glass. Small pastimes like that seemed to fascinate Jeddy, as they would a kid. Like the time he found the constable's whistle and went around blowing it for a week or more, with that high silly ripple of laughter that always bubbled out of him when he was pleased. Only, the prism amused him longer than anything—long enough, in fact, to change our whole town, and maybe the county!

Jeddy was a huge hulk of a man, all of six feet tall if he would stand up straight, instead of shuffle along in that ape-like crouch, with his arms dangling almost to his ankles. Red hair—which was never cut unless Tom Kimball, the barber, managed to coax him into his chair in return for an errand—hung down over his low forehead like a sheep-dog's, Jeddy's bright shoe-button-eyes peered through it, like some animal hiding in the brush; and his broken buck-teeth showed in a continual grin. He wore the same faded blue shirt and overalls, day after day, until Zack Mobley, who runs the clothing store, would give him a new pair and take the old ones away from him.

Well—that was our Jeddy, who lived in one of the slave cabins out back of the Jemison house . . . and who blew the lid off our town like a tornado, about five months ago.

LIKE I say, nobody paid much attention to him. It was a familiar sight—as familiar as the fountain in the square, or Holy Roller preachers yelling in front of the courthouse on Saturday—to see Jeddy shambling down the street, playing with some silly thing he had picked up someplace. Something shiny, or that made a funny noise. When he found the prism and went to peeking at everybody through it, we would just smile.

"Hi there, Jeddy! What ye got?"

And he would stop, grinning like a pleased baby, and squint at you through that piece of glass, cut in facets like a pendant and broken off across the middle. Jeddy never could talk plain, but those of us who had known him all our lives could make out what he meant by those few disjointed words he jabbered out: baby-words, in the deep guttural voice of a thirty-year-old man.

"Uh—Glass!" he would explain, squinting through the thing and hopping up and down like an excited kid. "See? It's all shiny! All . . . *colors!* Colors like rainbow!" If you happened to be facing the sun he'd move around to the other side, and peer at you silhouetted against the sunlight. . . .

That was when it would happen.

IT HAPPENED first to Belle Freely, our local miss who was reputed to be no better than she should be. Jeddy was about the only man in town who was ever caught speaking to Belle on the street, in case their wives or some neighbor might be looking. Long ago, when she had turned up with a baby and refused to name the father, Jemison had branded her with the scarlet letter "A". The fact that she worked as a waitress in the "Busy-B Cafe", every day from six to midnight, did nothing to change local opinion concerning her means of livelihood.

But late one evening Jeddy met her in front of the post office, amid the snickers of those watching while they waited for the mail to be put up. As usual he stopped, grinning vacantly, to peer at Belle through his little broken prism. She stopped, smiling wearily, her drab blondined hair looking more dyed than ever in the setting sun.

Jeddy took one look at her, to a background of whispers and muffled guffaws. Then:

"Oh-h!" he blurted. "Uh . . . I never knowed you was like *that,* Miss Belle! My, you're *purty. . . !* All *blue* like the sky in . . . in the summertime! Blue's a *good* color, uh, about the best color folks can be! Uh, they ain't many blue folks in this-here town. . . !"

He scowled suddenly, whirling on the group of idlers who were doing the whispering. Jeddy was a big man, like I said; and he was no pleasant sight, glowering through that long hair, with his lips drawn back from those buck-teeth in a snarl of anger. The boys began to edge away. Pretty soon there was nobody there, snickering at Belle Freely, except two evil-eyed poolroom hounds, who were in the habit of "bragging" about every woman in town—including the mayor's wife.

One of them, Shemp Hackett, nudged the other and winked.

"That your girl there, Jeddy?" he drawled. "That where you was last Monday night, when Old Man Lyle couldn't find ye to help him kill that weasel was after his chickens. . . ? A-visitin' with your girl, huh?"

Jeddy's scowl became a thundercloud. He took one step forward, swung his big ham-like fist—and Shemp was picking himself up off the sidewalk, with a cut lip and a very surprised expression.

"Duh, don't you talk like that about Miss Belle!" Jeddy roared at him as he, and also his wary-eyed buddy, backed out of range. "Don't *nobody* say bad things about Miss Belle no more, y'hear me? I've done seen her through my little rainbow-glass . . . and it don't *never* lie! The color it shows, that's what you are *inside.* And nobody, *not nobody,* can fool this-here little spy-glass! 'Cause it shows up the color you are, never mind how much you pretend. . . !"

Well . . . everybody laughed, of course, when the story got around.

Then, abruptly, everybody stopped laughing. Because, a nice-looking man came to town, hunting for a Julia Freeman—who turned out to be none other than our Belle. Seems the baby was not hers at all, but her dead sister's child. The father, who had been reported missing in action in the Pacific, had been engaged to Belle; but he had somehow lost his head and got her sister in trouble. Belle protected her name, though, and left home, to work in a cheap cafe rather than give up her sister's child to an orphanage. . . . It all came out when the man got Reverend Meecham to marry him and Belle, after telling him just how it was and what a fine character Belle, that misjudged lady really was.

BUT about Jeddy and his prism, there was still a lot of joking back and forth. The idea of Belle being a "blue person" struck people's fancy somehow or other, and they began to stop Jeddy on the street and ask him, just to kill time:

"Hi, Jeddy! How do *I* look through that piece of glass you got? What color am I?"

It tickled Jeddy, of course, all that attention. I doubt that more than one person a day ever spoke to him. But now everybody was speaking—even though he sensed, as a child senses such things, that we were only poking fun at him and his broken chandelier pendant.

He would stop and peer at anybody he met, though, just the same. Parting that shaggy bang of his, he would lift his prism up to one beady black eye and squint through it for a moment. Then he'd say, quite gravely and earnestly:

"You're a red person, Miz Boman. You got ways that hurt people around you—'cause red's a *hurtin'* color, and that's how you show up in my rainbow-glass. Mostly red, but shadin' off to orange around the edges."

"Well! I never!"

Miss Tessie Boman was our most sanctimonious church-goer. But she was also the biggest gossip in Jemisonville, and had broken up many a happy home with her tale-bearing.

"Who's green, Jeddy?" somebody would ask, snickering behind his hand. "That mean what we think it does?"

"Nope." Jeddy would shake his head solemnly. "If you're green, it don't mean like you're dumb. It jest means . . . well, that you ain't either bad or good, just in-between. There's a heap of green folks in this town," he announced cheerfully. "And maybe a few yeller ones, like Nurse Alison, or the Doc. Them are the ones that *help* folks in misery. The green 'nes do no *harm,*

but they jest, uh, kinda live for theirselves. . . ."

"Well, who's violet, Jeddy? Is that a good color?"

"Duh-h, that's the best there is!" That grinning face would beam at his tormentor. "Only, uh, there ain't no purple folks hereabouts . . . 'Cept maybe Granny Hodges; she's a *mite* purple around the edges. And . . . and babies," Jeddy would add softly. "All babies is, duh, kinda lavendar-blue. . . ."

SO THAT was how it went for about three weeks. Jeddy and his prism got to be a standing joke in Jemisonville. We talked about it at bridge parties and church socials, joshing one another that you need not try to wear "that yellow dress" or "that blue shirt," because your *true* color would show up in Jeddy's prism anyhow!

Of course, plenty of us took a peek through that little piece of glass. But all we ever saw was what everybody can see through a "translucent prism," as the Professor called it. Just rays of sunlight, broken up into all the colors of the spectrum. Maybe . . . maybe it was the *way* Jeddy held it to his eye. . . . Oh, *fiddlesticks!* Sounds like I *believe*. . .!

But then Professor Gowan, who reads a lot of crazy stuff nobody else would pick up, came out with the news that Jeddy's weird notion was by no means original. Metaphysical societies, he said, have long believed that an *astral body*—sort of a luminous mist that the soul, or personality, gives off—surrounds every human being. The Holy Men can see them—and those pure enough in heart to see people as what they are, instead of what they seem. Emanations, the Professor called them. Their colors range with the spectrum: from red, the most physical color, to violet, the most spiritual.

Scientifically, he says, the theory is sound enough . . . because it seems that the atoms of every chemical give up a vapor that can be determined by its color in the spectroscope. That's an instrument the astronomers use to find out what the stars are composed of, and how hot they are, and how dense. Maybe *people* give off a vapor, too. Maybe the kinds of chemicals we're made of, mostly, are determined by our characters, our personalities. . . .

I wouldn't know about that. I'm no scientist. And I'm no "higher thought" crackpot. I'm just a housewife and mother, and . . . and . . .

Well, all I know is what Jeddy said to me, that day outside the doctor's office. I spoke to him kindly, the way I always try to do, even though he is feeble-minded and a burden on the community. But my heart was not in it. *After what Doc Peebles had just told me?* My teeth were set hard in my lower lip, to keep the tears back. Tears of terror and despair, and hopelessness, and resentment. . . .

"Hello, Jeddy," I mumbled, trying to walk around his big hulking figure, standing there in the middle of the sidewalk to squint at me through his broken glass. "How's your peep-show working today?"

"Duh, fine! . . . Huh-huh! . . . Fine, Miz Mary!" Jeddy gurgled, like a big happy overgrown baby. "All colors! All pretty colors, folks are. . . !"

I tried to pass, but he would not move, so I waited patiently for him to finish his foolish little game. But I was twisting my hands together, fighting for self-control. . . .

Then, idly, I noticed how Jeddy's wide vacuous grin was fading. A frown of child-like bewilderment furrowed his low forehead—what I could see of it for that shaggy red bang. He peered at me intently through the prism.

"Duh, I . . . I ain't never see nobody like *that* before, Miz Mary!" he muttered, squinting harder at my silhouette against the mellow afternoon sunlight. "Uh . . . uh . . . I never see nobody that was blue in the middle . . . and red around the outside! Uh, not them two colors right together. . . !"

I smiled stiffly, hardly hearing his queer words. For, what the doctor had just told me was gnawing away at my mind like an evil gray rat. I wanted to push Jeddy out of my path, and run, sobbing, down the street until I came to my own familiar doorway. John was there, I knew, talking to the nominating committee of the reform group. . . . But I would just burst right in and throw myself into his sheltering arms, sobbing out the truth.

What did it matter to me now, what

would it matter to John, that he had been chosen to run against Gerald Vincent? Vincent, our next Congressman? The most powerfully-entrenched and completely crooked man in our county?

IT WAS he who had torn down the old Jemison place, planning to build on its site a paper mill! A smelly, noisy paper mill in the center of our quiet residential area! Jemisonville was a farm community, anyhow, whose livestock depended on the purity of the little creek that flowed through our town. Broad Creek—which Gerald Vincent proposed to use as a dumping place for his mill waste. . . ! John, my husband, had been fighting the move for a year, with growing success. . . .

But all that seemed so terribly unimportant now, compared with the terrible thing I was going to tell him in a few minutes. *Cancer!* The inoperable kind. And the thought of his being away from me, those last few months I had to live! Stumping the county for votes. . . ? No, I couldn't bear it. He wouldn't expect me to. When I told him, he would simply give up all thought of running against. . . .

I came to myself. Jeddy was still standing there, peeking at me through his bit of chandelier pendant. What was it he had said? I started. *Red! Red, with a . . . a blue center. . . ?* I tried to pass.

"Duh, wait, Miz Mary!" Jeddy blurted excitedly. "Uh, the red part—it's . . . it's fadin' away now! Like . . . like the blue was *pushin'* it. . . ."

My eyes widened, staring at him, at that foolish like piece of glass held up to his eye. Blue? Pushing away the red? Good, swallowing up the bad . . . as I thought what it would mean to John, to our town, to our whole county. Red? I wanted to hurt everyone, because I was so hurt and afraid. Resentful! Why must I suffer all alone, just because . . . ? But . . . Jeddy had said . . .

Non-sense! It could only be a crazy coincidence! How could this poor imbecilic creature know what was going on inside me? See it through a little shattered glass ornament that had come off a chandelier. . . ?

I turned, though. I ran back up to Doc Peebles' office, and made him promise not to tell John or anyone until after the election. Until Gerald Vincent was defeated, and our little farm-town of Jemisonville was given back to its people. Until my husband was sent to Washington—to represent them as honestly as one man knows how, instead of fleece them and use them, as Vincent would have done.

Well—he's there now. I still haven't told him—and won't until the pain becomes too unbearable. Somehow, though, I'm not afraid anymore. I guess everybody has to die, one way or another. . . .

Jeddy? Oh, he's still around. Playing with a white flint arrowhead now, that he found up on the west slope of Bent Mountain. Seems he lost his prism someplace—probably that time he was chasing the butterfly across Old Man Lyle's cow-pasture. Yes, it's gone . . . and of course, the whole thing was just silly. I mean, the idea of people being a certain *color,* according to whatever chemical gas their souls give off! Now, me—I certainly wouldn't set myself up as a *blue* person. . . ! Fiddlesticks! I'm as mean as the next one!

But now and then, I can't help wondering (supposing it *was* true) what color *Jeddy* would be, viewed through that little broken prism of his.

Violet, maybe. . . ? The color of saints . . . and babies?

WEIRD TALES

will have other stories by . . . . . .

MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN